“Neither Kha, Tai, nor Lao”: Language, Myth, Histories, and the Position of the Phong in Houaphan

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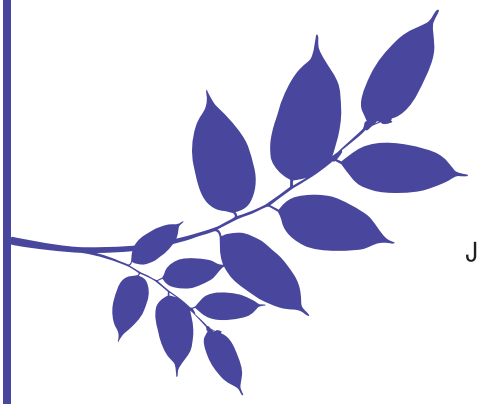



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Neither Kha, Tai, nor Lao: Language, Myth, Histories, and the Position of the Phong in Houaphan

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Abstract

In this paper we explore the intersections between oral and colonial history to re-examine the formation and interethnic relations in the uplands of Northern Laos. We unpack the historical and contemporary dynamics between "majority" Tai, "minority" Kha groups and the imagined cultural influence of "Lao" to draw out a more nuanced set of narratives about ethnicity, linguistic diversity, cultural contact, historical intimacy, and regional imaginings to inform our understanding of upland society. The paper brings together fieldwork and archival research, drawing on previous theoretical and areal analysis of both authors.

1. Introduction

The Phong of Laos are a small group of 30,000 people with historical strongholds in the Sam Neua and Houamuang districts of Houaphan province (northeastern Laos). They stand out among the various members of the Austroasiatic language family – which encompass 33 out of the 50 ethnic groups in Laos – as one of the few completely Buddhicized groups. Unlike their animist Khmu neighbours, they have been Buddhist since precolonial times (see Bouté 2018 for the related example of the Phunoy, a Tibeto-Burman speaking group in Phongsaly Province).

In contrast to the Khmu (Évrard, Stolz), Rmeet (Sprenger), Katu (Goudineau, High), Hmong (Lemoine, Tapp), Phunoy (Bouté), and other ethnic groups in Laos, the Phong still lack a thorough ethnographic study. Joachim Schliesinger (2003: 236) even called them "an obscure people". This working paper is intended as first step towards exploring the history, language, and culture of this less known group. We hope to encourage other researchers to follow this initiative and take a closer look at the Phong and their specific position within the multi-ethnic setting of Houaphan.

This paper is inspired by a rare archival find: A Phong-French dictionary compiled by the colonial administrator Antoine Lagrèze in 1925 (Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence; ANOM RSL/Z). Besides offering a unique chance to study language change and pragmatics, the unpublished manuscript includes an insightful ethnographic study that calls for closer ethnohistorical scrutiny (sample text in Appendix I). Our working paper thus focuses on the linguistic and historical aspects of this specific ethnic category. It includes an in-depth

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study of the key origin myth of the Phong – the story of the culture hero Hat Ang. In addition to contributing to anthropological knowledge production on the Phong, we aim to investigate the interethnic dynamics that shape local lifeworlds in culturally diverse contexts like Houaphan (see Badenoch and Tomita (2013) for the related example of Luang Namtha in northwestern Laos). Our discussion includes material from archival research and fieldwork conducted with the Phong in Houaphan and communities of Phong in the Vientiane area.

Our work with the Phong has raised many fascinating questions about the history and identity within the multiethnic landscapes of Houaphan. Our understanding of the region has been informed by insightful work on the Tai and their socio-political systems. The Tai-Kha relationship continues to be a productive, but frustrating framework for unpacking local histories, cultural identifications, and ethnic formations. Recent work by Pierre Petit (2020) has added to the existing body of knowledge about Tai political structures, but the position of Austroasiatic groups remains woefully understudied. Grant Evans (2000) has brought some attention to the recent cultural history of the Ksingmul, but still within the framework of Tai-ization, the process by which non-Tai groups assimilated to the stronger political-economic structures and dominant cultural practices (see as well Évrard 2019). Georges Condominas (1990), drawing on the work of Vietnamese scholars, as well as his own fieldwork, has synthesized and theorized how the interethnic relations of these upland areas define a social space. The Phong further complicate these questions because of the number of self-identification terms they use, variation in their languages and accounts of a history of interactions that do not fit with the received wisdom. Research focusing on non-Tai populations from a multidisciplinary perspective is needed if the social complexity of these localities is to be appreciated. Importantly, it is this perspective that is missing from regional histories. In this paper, we bring together analysis from anthropology, history, linguistics and folklore to explore the formation of ethnic worlds in the uplands of northern Laos.

Within this perspective, language is critical. Among the very few detailed studies of Phong language and history published to date is Bui Khanh The's *The Phong Language of the Ethnic Phong Which Lived Near the Melhir (sic) Muong Pon Megalith in Laos (Field Work Notes): An Introduction of data and description* (1973). This 1,200-word list and description of Phong phonology, morphology and syntax includes some ethnographic commentary from their fieldwork. Data from this study is included, referenced as Bui. The title of the study refers to the megaliths in Houamuang district studied by the archaeologists Madeleine Colani in the 1930s and Anna Källén more recently (see Colani 1935; Källén 2016). Since the megaliths of "Sao Hintang" ('twenty standing stones') were located in the Phong settlement area, local oral traditions falsely identify the Phong as the original creators of the mysterious stones (dating back three millennia like the famous stone jars of Xieng Khouang province). Given the fact that the Phong insist on having migrated from the upper Nam Ou a few centuries ago, we can only speculate about the autochthonous population of yore who created the megaliths. Interestingly, the megaliths are mentioned in the Phong origin myth of the culture hero Hat Ang (see the detailed discussion below). Further information on ethnography, linguistics and mythology are provided by only a few colonial sources. Besides Lagrèze's manuscript, another vocabulary was compiled by Macey (1905). Further ethnographic information on the Phong was provided by the prolific travel writer Alfred Raquez (1905) and the colonial administrator Adolphe Plunian (1905).

2. Tai society as an ethnolinguistic mosaic

This paper is an exploration of the Tai/Kha relationship from the perspective of the Phong, who, as Austroasiatic people living among various Tai groups, "should" fall under the Kha category. The Tai/Kha framework has been useful, and efforts to continuously unpack the diversity and dynamism of the Kha category have produce more nuanced understandings of the uplands. But it is necessary to step back to recognize that the entire relationship is an abstracted and idealized one, not only from the Kha perspective, but from the Tai as well. The cultural and linguistic differences between various Tai groups may be downplayed, and subsumed under a locally hegemonic understanding of Tai political, economic and social systems. This can be observed in frequent references to historical processes of Taiization and more recently Laoization (Évrard 2019). Granted, in the case of the Khmu, one of the better understood Austroasiatic groups in the region, internal diversity is partially the product of their interaction with different Tai groups. Nonetheless, the category Tai lacks nuance in many streams of historical and anthropological research. The field of historical linguistics, however, utilizes analytical tools that use linguistic characteristics in sound systems, grammatical structures and pragmatics, to discern different types of influence on Austroasiatic languages. A good example of this is the 2014 Kammu Yùan Dictionary by Svantesson et al., which makes specific efforts to distinguish between Lao and Lue sources in the significant body of words borrowed from Tai languages.

As we discuss the position of the Phong within the Tai cultural landscapes of Houaphan, it is necessary to recognize the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Tai groups in the region. The divide between Buddhist and non-Buddhist groups is an obvious and important factor that contributes to social dynamics and inter-ethnic relations. There are significant linguistic differences as well, and these should be considered and utilized in a systematic way. As always, ethnonyms can be confusing, and while they are important data for historical and social analysis, they should also be treated with respect for the complex linguistic nuances that underpin them. Chamberlain's work on Tai historical linguistics offers insights into the diversity of these groups, and are essential reading for anyone interested in the uplands of Mainland Southeast Asia.

The word *tai* can be used in three ways: to refer to the linguistic family or a sub-group, as part of an ethnonym of many of these groups, and in reference to these languages or their speakers. The old form of this word is the Proto-Tai ***day**. One important distinction to be made is whether the /t/ sound in the *tai* element of the ethnonym is aspriated /t^h/ or unaspirated /t/. This phonological development, in which Proto-Tai *d changed to /t/ in some languages (such as Tai Dam and Tai Daeng) and /t^h/ in others (such as Phuan, Lao and Thay Neua), is part of a larger criteria in the historical classification of Tai languages. The use of this aspiration criteria has been discussed as the P/PH divide, which represents two historical trajectories of the Proto-Tai initial voiced consonants (Chamberlain 1991). We follow Chamberlain's suggestion of referring to the /tay/ groups as Tai and the /t^hay/ groups as Thay. In the Tai category we find isoglosses between Thay Vat and Tai Dam in the northern area of the province, and between Thay Neua varieties and Tai Daeng in the rest of the province.

The term Lao is also complex and confusing (Chamberlain 2019). The entire area of Houaphan was part of a geographical region referred to historically as Ai-Lao, but aside from recent arrivals of government staff in the cities, people of the Lao ethnolinguistic group have not been part of the ethnic landscape of the region; in other words, one does not find ethic Lao villages in this region. Tai dialectology takes the structure of the tone system to be a key

identifying criteria, and the Lao language and its varieties are characterized by a specific pattern of historical tone mergers that are not present in the Tai languages of Houaphan. Therefore, linguistically the languages spoken by the Tai peoples in Houaphan are most accurately identified by the term Tai-Thay, which is does not include Lao, and importantly avoids confusion with the term Thai and its association with Thailand. To make this situation more complex, the term Lao /laaw/ is also used as part of ethnonyms, meaning 'people', much in the same way as *tai* and *thay.* In Houaphan, one finds the term Thay Phut, and more recently Lao Phut, which is often understood as "the Buddhist Lao", but in fact should be taken to mean "Thay people who have adopted Buddhism". Matters are confused further, because Lao is used under the modern Lao nation state as a politically inclusive "people term"; the most pertinent example being Lao Phong, which is indexical of an ideology that seeks proximity to discourses of a Lao political and civilizational center.

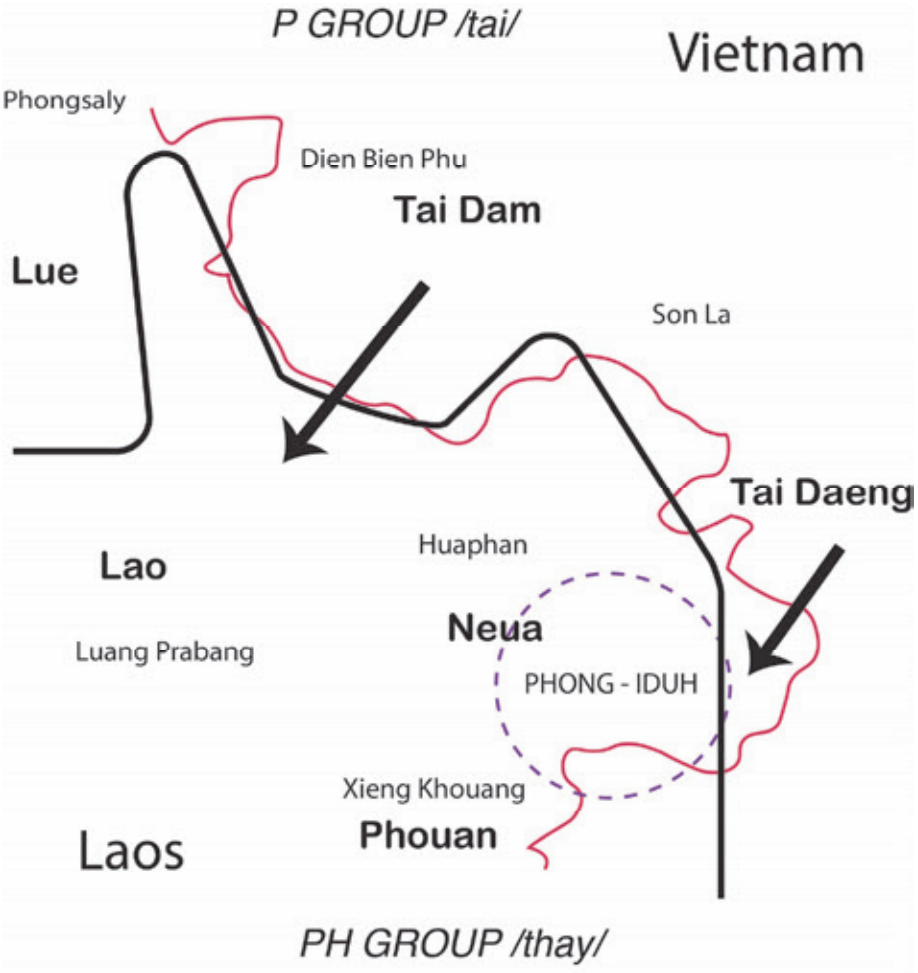

Fig. 1: P/PH Isogloss in Houaphan

As is shown on this thematic map of the P/PH isogloss (Figure 1), the area of Houaphan is historically a "PH area", where the Neua-Phuan languages were spoken, but in the 19th and 20th centuries P-speaking groups such as Tai Dam and Tai Daeng have migrated into the area, giving the more textured landscape of language variation within the Tai population. This would show that the Phong would have only encountered the P-speaking groups after these migrations, and importantly for the following discussion, means that they were not traditionally part of the political structures of the Tai Dam or Tai Daeng. The primary point of linguistic contact with Tai languages would be the Neua-Phuan languages, of which it is difficult to set clear borders

(Chamberlain 1971). Thus, it is worth proposing that in the context of Huaphanh, we are speaking of a Thay/Kha relationship, in terms of the local linguistic ecology.[3]

This linguistic Tai-Thay distinction is an important frame for understanding the social dynamics of the region. For example, oral tradition holds that the Tai Xoy are a group of animist, Tai-speaking people who have lived in Muang Xoy since migrating to Houaphanh from the Tai Daeng areas adjacent on the east (Boutin 1937). Some of them even ended up in the Nam Et area and partially converted to Buddhism while keeping the toponym Tai Xoy (Petit 2020: 78). However, it is also likely that those Buddhist Tai Xoy communities were actually Thay Neua from Muang Xoy who in the 1980s were displaced by joint Ho Chinese and Tai Daeng forces (Mironneau 1968). In Muang Xoy, the longstanding conflict between Buddhist Thay Neua and animist Tai Daeng simmered until the 1930s. French missionaries took advantage of this antagonism and converted some Tai Daeng communities in Houaphan (see Degeorge 1924 on the Catholic Mission in Houaphan). This was successful to a considerable degree because it arguably was a form of resistance to Thay Neua dominance and the pressure to become Buddhist.

In response, some Tai Daeng groups scattered around the province from their center at Muang Xoy, which had been a Tai Daeng stronghold. Tai people from Muang Xoy refused to call themselves Tai Daeng, adopting the ethnonym Tai Xoy instead. According to local elders, Thay Neua and Tai Daeng relations had been strained in the past in Houaphanh, and one still hears jokes about the Tai Daeng saying *hua pen kɛɛw, ʔɛɛw pen laaw* "Their heads are Vietnamese, their waists are Lao", pointing towards their foreign origins and resistance to integration into the local Buddhist landscape. The intertwining of ethnicity, inter-ethnic relations and cultural difference "produces" many types of ethnogenesis among the Tai as well[4]. It is possible that the Phong were caught in this tension and decided to "take sides", thereby solidifying the the "memory" of their self-identification with the Thay Neua. With the involvement of the King of Luang Prabang, a historical affiliation with the "Lao" is also possible. At this point, we offer the above as an entry-point into a more nuanced view on local history, ethnogenesis and cultural influence.

Thus, it is critical that these terms be kept clear when speaking of historical relations, multilingualism, and cultural contact. In this paper, we refer to Tai as a general term referring to groups of people that speak Tai-Thay languages, often in terms of the framework of interactions between Austroasiatic peoples like the Phong and the Tai-Thay groups around them. The term Lao is limited to references to the modern nation state and its ethnic classifications, or Buddhist Thay peoples who influenced the Phong in the past. This reference also requires unpacking, for if the historical Phong narratives have geographic veracity, they would have been in contact with the Lao of Luang Prabang, as well as the Lue of the mountains west of the Nam Ou river. In this paper, when we discuss the relationship between Tai and Kha, this refers to the multiple relationships that obtain between groups of people speaking Tai-Thay languages and those speaking Austroasiatic languages.

3. Phong across ethnicity and governance in Houaphan

In 1953, the French missionary Père Jean Mironneau encouraged the EFEO director Henri Deydier to visit a peculiar ethnic group: The "Kha Phong" (Deydier 1954: 19; cf. Macey 1907:

[3] Sincere thanks to Jim Chamberlain for on-going discussions that led to this section and the map, which draws on his previous work.
[4] Personal communication, Sisomphone Soukhavongsa and Jim Chamberlain.

1411). This small group had attracted his attention as they had Buddhist monks and temples – uncommon for the so-called "Kha," the Austroasiatic speaking groups that were considered 'uncivilized' by the French colonial administrators. His surprising observation reflects the one by Antoine Lagrèze three decades earlier, who even hesitated to include the Phong in the disrespectful "kha" (serf) category. Already at the turn of the 20th century, Alfred Raquez noted that from the Lao "[the Phong] learned the Buddhist religion" including festivals and calendar, and ironically remarked: "But try telling these semi-civilized people they are Kha in origin!" (Raquez 1905; English translation available online[5]). We should flag Raquez's comment about the Lao origins of Phong Buddhism, as we are not sure if the Phong lived in an area where they would have come into direct contact with Lao.

Interestingly, Lagrèze divided his dictionary into "Phong" and "Kha" by which he referred to the Khmu (whose language is different from the Phong, even if they share the Austroasiatic language family; see Foropon 1927: 8; Boutin 1937: 95). However, the Phong indeed form part of the "Tai vs. Kha" complex as famously studied by Georges Condominas: a hierarchical (ritual and political) relationship between an autochthonous, Austroasiatic speaking population, and the dominant Tai/Lao groups in the diverse *meuang* of the Tai-speaking world (Condominas 1990; see Evans 2002). The relationship between people categorized as "Kha" and their dominant neighbours was marked by relations of tribute and *corvée* obligations, and by annual rituals reproducing the sociopolitical hierarchy of the respective *meuang*. Even if neither Austroasiatic nor any other group claim autochthony in Houaphan, the Tai/Kha scheme structures local sociopolitical organization. As colonial sources reflect, there is some confusion between the categories "Lao" and "Tai Neua"/ "northern Tai" (more accurately Thay Neua, the group unrelated to the Tai Neua of Luang Namtha) and – to a lesser degree – the Tai Daeng and Tai Dam. The French considered the Tai as a 'civilized race' with a class of notables, while Phong, Khmu, Hmong and Yao are represented as half-civilized or even "savages", politically and culturally subordinated to the Tai/Lao groups (who were trusted with key positions in local administration). However, the Phong remain an ambiguous category, "neither Lao, Tai, nor Kha" (Raquez 1905: 1398), with their local elites considered useful intermediaries to administer certain peripheral regions as our discussion of Lagrèze's dictionary will demonstrate.

Common to many Austroasiatic speaking people is the idea of being dispersed and dispossessed by Tai invaders in bygone times. Like other origin myths of Tai and Austroasiatic people, Phong oral traditions assume an early conflictive relationship between the Phong and Tai people. Lagrèze notes that four to five centuries ago (in the 15th century), the "northern Tai" chased the Phong from the rich river valleys, echoing contemporary accounts of the expulsion of autochthonous "Kha" by immigrant Tai peoples (Evans 2002; Turton 2000). Phong mythology (see below) addresses the precarious Tai/Kha relationship and provides interesting ethnohistorical explanations for Phong perceptions of past and present marginality.

According to Phong oral history collected in the Phong stronghold Ban Saleuy[6] (Sam Neua district, Houaphan province) and in a Phong neighborhood in Sam Neua town, the Phong migrated from the upper Nam Ou to Houaphan (via Luang Prabang province) in the 18th century. As the myth of Hat Ang indicated, the Phong original settlement by the Nam Ou (an important trade route; see Bouté 2018) was already marked by a close relationship between the

[5] https://missionraquez.wordpress.com/2020/05/16/dispatch-six/

[6] Although there is no local narrative to elaborate on the etymology of the name of this important village, we note that /saləəy/ means 'prisoner' in local Tai languages. Moreover, there is an old Austroasiatic word with the meaning 'prisoner of war' reconstructed as ***ɟləəy** (Shorto 2006).

Phong and the Lao court. These oral accounts roughly match with Raquez's account of Phong notables from Ban Saleuy who held that "their race originated at the source of the Nam Ou, which they left to settle in the kingdom of Vientiane, and then moved on to Hua Phan territory exactly 183 years ago" (Raquez 1905: 1401). This could mean around 1720, i.e. shortly after the division of Lan Sang into the competing kingdoms of Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang and Champasak, a time of political upheaval and uncertainty.

Since the Phunoy moved down the Nam Ou in the late 18th century, according to Vanina Bouté (2018), it is not unlikely that they occupied fields left by the Phong before. This speculation would raise question about the links between the Phong and groups in the regions of Luang Namtha, for which the ethnolinguistic section below aims to offer some ideas. According to their oral traditions, the Phong crossed the mountains of northern Luang Prabang province and the watershed between the Nam Ou (and, thus, the Mekong) and the eastward running rivers of Houaphan (Nam Ma, Nam Et, Nam Sam, Nam Neun, to name a few). After their migration to Houaphan, the Phong settled in upland valleys and plateaus of present-day Sam Neua and Houamuang districts.

Traditional livelihoods of the Phong villages include upland swidden cultivation and only little wet rice cultivation. Besides rice and corn, the Phong cultivate cotton and tobacco. They keep buffaloes, cows, pigs, and goats. Chicken raising is considered a female task. Fishing forms an important component of local subsistence. Collecting non-timber forest products is another traditional livelihood strategy. Ban Saleuy is famous for the trade of butterflies and other insects. Phong women in Ban Saleuy demonstrate elaborate weaving skills which are clearly inspired by their Lao and Tai neighbors (in Lagrèze's days, the art of silk weaving was still unknown among the Phong).

Phong livelihoods are determined by terrain, similar to those of other ethnic groups in mountainous Houaphan. The Tai groups practice more wet rice, but also swidden cultivation, while the Hmong and Yao often lack the little wet rice fields that Phong and Khmu cultivate along small rivers and creeks. Like other upland groups, the Phong have been subject to resettlement programs so that small upland villages have been relocated to larger settlements such as Ban Saleuy at the Road No. 6 (see Appendix 3). The houses resemble the Tai model (stilt houses) and today show concrete foundations and metal roofs, and other markers of modernity.

Houaphan, historically a confederation of several upland *meuang* or *kong*, is an ethnically heterogeneous province with a dozen ethnic groups – with the Thay Neua/Lao Phut only one ethnic minority (albeit an economically and politically powerful one) among others. In 1895, commissar Monpeyrat counted 2,474 Phong and Ksingmul *inscrits* from a total of 32,990. The Lao constituted less than half of the population (15,602 out of 32,990 *inscrits;* Tai Deng 10,443, Tai Dam 745, Khmu 2,422, Hmong 1,284; "Monographie du territoire des Ua phan thang hoc"; ANOM INDO GGI 26509). Notably, the Phong concentrated in Houamuang and Muang Ven (including the Phong stronghold Ban Saleuy, today Sam Neua district) with 980 and 1,275 *inscrits*, respectively (while the Ksingmul only settled in Xieng Kho further north). In Houamuang, they constituted almost half of the population, a significant demographic factor until the present day.

The general demographic ratio remained stable up to the 1920s when commissar Foropon (1927: 10) counted 2,000 Phong out of roughly 40,000. Here and in other sources, the Buddhist Tai/Lao (numbering 17,500) were categorized as "Tai Neua", the group we refer to

as Thay Neua, indicating linguistic and cultural difference from the Lao of the Mekong basin; see Tappe 2018). During the Indochina Wars and after the communist revolution of 1975, however, a considerable part of the Thay population (and most Christian Tai communities) either migrated to the lowlands or abroad. According to a recent census of Houaphan that uses the official ethnic categories (Lao National Statistics Centre 2007), the Lao Phut constitute only 26.7% of the population (75,012 out of 280,938), less than the Tai category (80,782, including Tai Deng, Tai Dam, Tai Khao) and only slightly more than the Hmong (68,289; the numbers of the Austroasiatic groups: Khmu 28,879, Phong 13,517, and Ksingmul 8,140).

In Houaphan, all ethnic groups share a history of migration, and none claims autochthony in the region. However, the Phong are sometimes associated with the megaliths in Houamuang district, as mentioned above. When French archaeologist Madeleine Colani explored the archaeological site in the 1930s, she mentioned an ancient giant race named Phong that – according to local Tai mythology – had assembled the stone circles. Even if numerous myths – including the Phong origin myth of the culture hero Hat Ang – hint at a connection between the Phong and the megaliths, the autochthonous population does not 'match' with present-day Phong as historically more recent immigrants. This historical fact notwithstanding, Tai people might conceptualize the Phong as autochthonous because it is part and parcel of the Tai vs. Kha logic. This view requires an ethnic Other as linkage between *meuang* and *pa*, capable of harnessing the non-human potency of the wilderness including wild animals and spirits (see Kleinod 2020). The Phong perhaps refer to generic non-Tai Others within the *meuang* structure as the following discussion of the ethnonym "Phong" suggests.

4. Phong: An ambiguous ethnonym in the "Tai-Kha" complex

Ethnonymy in multilingual landscapes is notoriously complex, as people are known by autonyms and exonyms. Autonyms give form to the ethnic imaginations of community, while exonyms often reflect negative connotations. In the event that a group's autonym means 'person', such as with the Khmu, the term can be flexible and accommodating of internal diversity (Proschan 1997). Other native terms can be used to encode feelings of intimacy and inclusion, such as the Khmu *tmooy*, meaning 'guest' and providing a tool for distinguishing internal subgroupings based on lexical differences, geography and other distinguishing features (Évrard 2007).

The ethnonym Phong is highly problematic, from both the social and linguistic points of view. First, there is confusion, often reflected in official data as well as research, created by the existence of three groups of Austroasiatic people living in relative proximity to each other. Two groups of Phong (or Pong) speak Kri-Mol languages (Chamberlain 2020), while the other group is included in the Khmuic branch. The languages, history, livelihoods, and cultural practices of these two should be treated separately. Furthermore, when collecting ethnographic, historical or linguistics data among the Phong in Houaphan, one comes across many different ethnonyms, at several different levels of social organization: Phong Laan, Phong Piat, Phong Phaen, Phong Khami, Phong Cepuang/Tapuang, Phong Pung and Phong Saleuy, to name the most frequently heard when discussing Phong sub-groupings.

Historically, the name Kha Phong and Pou Kanieng/K'nieng are mentioned in colonial era documents (Macey 1905). In official LPDR documents the term Kaniang has been used with increasing frequency. In a recent survey of Phong languages (Kato 2013), all five Phong villages surveyed in Houaphan gave /kniəŋ/ as the autonym. In the relocated villages surveyed in the Vientiane area, this term is less frequently encountered. In more formal settings, the

ethnonym *Lao Phong* is increasingly used to highlight Lao citizenship and belonging to the so-called "Lao multi-ethnic people" (*pasaason laaw bandaa phaw*) according to official state rhetoric in Lao PDR (see Pholsena 2006, Schlemmer 2017, Tappe 2017).

In the introduction to the *Dictionnaire Kha Phong*, Lagrèze refers to the Phong as "Les Pong ou Pou-pay"[7]. Unlike the Kha, by which he means Khmu, the Phong are limited to the *tasseng* of Muong-Peun and Song-Khao. The Kha, or Khmu, are referred to as "Les Kha ou Phou Theng". As is often the case in the uplands, ethnonyms must be interpreted within the context of local histories. Attention to linguistic detail is also important, because the interplay of exonyms and autonyms can provide hints about internal socio-political dynamics, as well as larger inter-group relations.

It seems clear that /phɔɔŋ/ and its variants, such as /puəŋ/ and /puŋ/ are names that have been used by local Tai to refer to several groups of closely related Austroasiatic people. However, the current use of the /phɔɔŋ/ term has a broader origin within the social structures of multiethnic Houaphan, upon which the political systems of the Tai Dam and Tai Daeng are overlaid. Taylor's map (1983) of the protectorate of An Nam has Phong located upstream of the Giao, in the area between the Red and Black Rivers, probably extending to the Ma River as well (Figure 2).

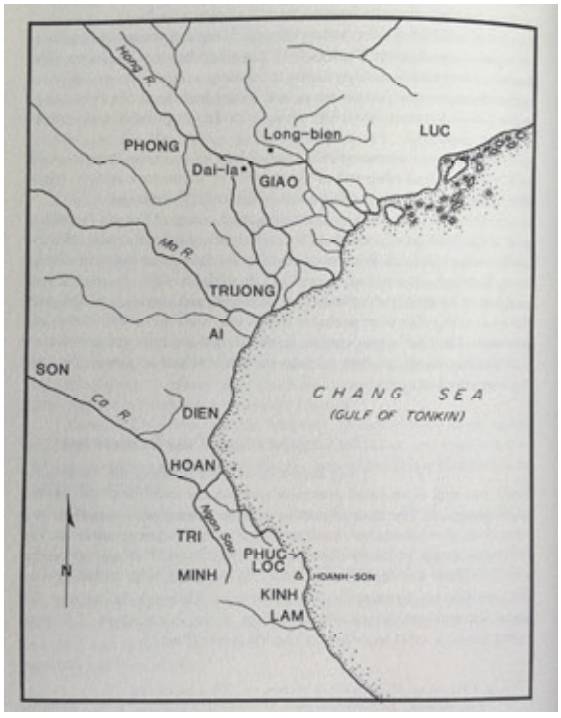

Fig. 2: Taylor's Protectorate of An Nam showing Phong

This corresponds to the area of the Sip Song Chu Tai and the cultural mosaics it framed. How did a broad geopolitical reference turn into an ethnonym? Chamberlain (1991) discusses the rendering of Tai terms "bông" and "bôn" in Chinese characters in an inscription, located in Nghe An province of Vietnam, in his analysis of the linguistic ethnohistory of the Tai and surrounding people of the area. He suggests that these correspond to Phong and Phuan, the

[7] French colonial sources can be confusing, as the notation of local names and words often does not make a distinction between aspirated and unaspirated sounds, such as t/th and p/ph.

latter being the Tai people historically centered in the adjacent area of Xieng Khouang. In this same analysis, Chamberlain supports the hypothesis that this phong is the same phong in the name of Souvanna Khamphong, the grandfather of Fa Ngum, the first king of the Lan Xang kingdom. In the poetic register of storytelling among the Phong Laan people, who are located on the border of Houaphan and Xieng Khouang, they make poetic reference to themselves as /thay phɔɔŋ thay phuən/. It is unlikely that this is an assertion of Phuan ethnicity or origin, but it does suggest the perception that they were people historically associated with or located between these political systems.

As described above, historically the Phong interaction with Tai groups probably centered on Neua-Phuan types. This means that they were not integrated into the ethno-social system of the Tai Dam. Nonetheless, since the Tai Dam system has been taken as a model for understanding ethnic relationships in the area in terms of Tai/Kha relationships, we discuss the possible implications of an alternative model in the Phong context. The hierarchy of social relations in the Tai Dam polities has been described and summarized by Condominas (1990), adapted below for reference (Table 1).

Table 1: Condominas' Tai Ethno-political Hierarchy

<table>
<tr><th>ethnic group</th><th colspan="2">status</th><th>collective decision-making, military functions and share of rice-fields</th><th>manpower</th><th colspan="2">myth of origin</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">tay</td><td colspan="2">tao</td><td rowspan="3">take part in it</td><td rowspan="2">manpower takers</td><td colspan="2">lineage issues from Great Thên</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">pay</td><td>mo notables</td><td rowspan="3">gourd</td><td rowspan="2">clean exit</td></tr>
<tr><td>others</td><td rowspan="2">manpower givers</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">kuong ñŏk</td><td rowspan="2">excluded from it</td></tr>
<tr><td>sa'</td><td colspan="2">puă' pai</td><td>blackened exit</td></tr>
</table>

The system consists of structural relations oriented towards a clear Tai/Kha opposition but is more complex. The problematic *sa'* category (*sa'* is local cognate of the Tai term *kha*) is made up of two groups of "serfs," one of which is predominantly Tai (*kuong ñŏk*) while the other is predominantly Austroasiatic (*puă' pai*). In this region, the *sa'* category would have been populated by the Ksingmul, Khmu, as well as other smaller groups such as Laha and Khang, both of which have undergone significant Tai-ization.

The Austroasiatic origins of the Phong would suggest that they were treated in the Tai world as *sa'*. References such as "Kha Phong" and "Sa Phong" would support this. Colonial commentators such as Lagrèze noted that the Phong differed from other Kha in "dress, language and physique", offering that they were "neither Tai nor Kha" (see as well Raquez 1905). As will be discussed more below, the Phong view on their cultural affiliations within the local cultural-political system shines a different light on the simplistic Tai-Kha divide. So, while the term Kha Phong could simply mean "the vassals of the Phong leader", it seems that at some point the term came to be used specifically for this group of people speaking a set of closely related languages that was not Khmu or Ksingmul, yet not Tai. Furthermore, as Condominas suggests, the cultural importance of the Gourd Myth (see also Proschan 1997 and Dang 1993), through which many groups explain the origin of the many different ethnic groups and their languages, is another interesting point – in the Phong oral tradition, Gourd origins are not mentioned. It is worth noting also that the *pua'* status has become an (derogatory) ethnonym for the Ksingmul who have lived within the Tai Vat and Thay Ay cultural zones for as long as memory holds. Because the framework includes other socio-economic and cultural factors, there are several useful angles that an ethnographic-archive approach can take.

There are many contemporary place names in the Tai-Lao landscape that include a /phɔɔŋ/ element, suggesting that the geographical scale of a previous *phong* political, or at least social, unit was reduced over time. Indeed, Khammanh (2004) mentions that in the Tai Daeng political system, phong is a level of administration between the village (*baan*) and the district (*meuang*), usually consisting of 3-5 villages, and led by a *kwaan phɔɔŋ* (or *taaw phɔɔŋ* in the Tai Dam system.) The term is found also in Diguet's 1895 description of Tai Daeng. Moreover, Petit (2020) discusses the role of the "*phya phông*" (with the short /o/ vowel, in contrast to the long /ɔɔ/ vowel) in Muang Aet, a leader of a "second-level polity" responsible for organizing corvee labor under the French. Similarly, Pan (ms. 1975) mentions *phong/fong* as a local leader under the *phia* in Tai Dam Chu San. In the modern Lao language, the word *phɔɔŋ* (ພ້ອງ) 'group, company; relatives' indicates a shift the sense of the word to the people, rather than the political unit. In the Austroasiatic Bit language, now spoken in Phongsaly, Oudomxay and Luang Namtha but originating in the upper Black River area, the elaborate phrase *luuk nɔɔŋ pɔɔŋ pay* [Bit pronunciation of /phɔɔŋ phay/], refers to those loyal to the *chao meuang* and available for military mobilization, but without ethnic specification (Badenoch 2019). In this parallel phrase, *luuk nɔɔŋ* "subordinates, followers" (literally "children and younger siblings" is collocated with *pɔɔŋ pay*. In Condominas' system *pay* (/pay/ - short /a/ vowel)[8] is contrasted with *pua' pai* (/puəʔ pay/ – long vowel /aa/ vowel). Bit contrasts vowel length, so a literal translation of *pɔɔŋ pay* (short vowel in *pay*) could put them in the Tai category. Alternatively, *pɔɔŋ* could be an assimilated non-Tai group, like kuong ñŏk. Proschan (1997) suggests that from the Khmu ethnohistorical perspective, Phong meant "a region without a chief" or "inhabitants of remote area."

[8] The term /phay/ from the Proto-Tai form ***bray** B4 probably referred to people who had been sertfs but were released from their serfdom (Jim Chamberlain, p.c. referencing William Gedney p.c.)

Into the mix of ethnicity, social status, and language in Houaphan, we must bring the O-du/Iduh/Tai Hat. Their language is closely related to Phong, and they share the /pram/ word for 'person'. Unlike the Phong, they live on both sides of the Laos-Vietnam border. In Vietnam, they have mixed intensively with the local Tai and Khmu, and their language is in critical decline (Ito 2013). The Iduh language in Laos is intact, and basic vocabulary was collected in the the Austroasiatics linguistics project of the 1980s mentioned below.

Cross-linguistic, cross-ethnic references to people groupings can be as frustrating as ethnonyms but should be given full consideration as alternative sources of social history. The following sections explore this question from various perspectives within a Phong frame of cultural and historical reference, drawing on data from folk ethnography, language, and myth. Our explorations follow the intersections between linguistics, folklore, and colonial narratives. What seems most important here is the fact that the Phong remained outside of the social structures of the Tai and maintained more contact with speakers of Thay languages.

5. The Phong view on multiethnic landscape

The Phong see themselves as in the middle of a four-tiered social system shared with the Tai and Khmu. In the Tai system exemplified by the Tai Dam, the Austroasiatic speaking groups are considered *kha/saa* or *puak/puaʔ*. Austroasiatic cultures are taken in opposition to Tai, including livelihoods (upland vs lowland agriculture), literacy, belief systems, residence patterns and roles in tax and labor mobilization. The Phong system sets them apart from these other Austroasiatic-speaking people, whom they refer to as *təkaw or kəkaw*.

Three civilizational criteria color the Phong discussion of this social hierarchy: weaving, irrigated rice cultivation and Buddhism (Table 2).

Table 2: Ethnic Categories in Phong Landscapes

Phong category		**weaving**	**irrigated rice**	**Buddhism**
rii	Thay Nua, Phuan, Lao	●	●	●
phɔɔŋ	Phong groups	●	●	●
thay	Tai Dam, Tai Daeng, Tai Khao	●	●	
təkaw/kəkaw	Khmu			

The Phong add a level of complexity to the familiar Tai/Kha framework. Importantly, the Phong consider themselves to be part of the Lao Buddhist tradition, which sets them apart from the local Tai groups that hold the status of power in local political systems. The *rii* category is interesting because it combines Thay, with whom the Phong have had intense contact, and Lao, which whom they do not encounter directly in Houaphan. This "Lao" claim may refer more to an idealized Buddhist identity. It should be pointed out that the Phong *thay* means the people we refer to here as Tay. This may seem confusing when looked at from the outside, but is consistent internally, because the "Thay" groups are called *rii*, and in the Phong use the aspirated *thay* because their main influence is from a PH language.

The self-identification forms such as *thay ʔay* 'our group', suggest that when speaking of ethnic identity associated with the in-group, the boundaries are more rigid, but the broader social categories are more flexible. Reconstruction of their historical movements from the Phong oral tradition seems to put Phong in the realm of the Buddhist Thay, rather than other

non-Buddhist Tai groups, which may explain their views on the social hierarchy in Houaphan. The Tai groups' lack of Buddhism puts the Phong in an interesting position in their own system, in which they are in some sense above the politically and economically more powerful. Like most Buddhist groups, Buddhism of the Phong retains many animistic practices that are specific to their own cultural traditions.

The Phong are certainly more oriented towards the Buddhist Lao/Thay Neua than to the animist Tai Daeng who form important settlements in Sam Tai and Viengxai districts. While colonial and missionary sources (Boutin 1937; Mironneau 1968) have documented the tense relationship between the Lao/Thay Neua – privileged by the French residents to guarantee the loyalty of the Luang Prabang royal house – and the Tai Daeng – backed by Catholic missionaries – who had occupied deserted fields after the Ho and Cheuang troubles of the late-19th century. The Phong appear as mere bystanders of this conflict that was settled through relocation programs in the 1930s. In colonial times, there was hardly any overlap of the Phong and Tai Daeng regions of settlement (the watershed between Nam Sam and Nam Neun forming a natural boundary). How the Buddhist Phong perceive the non-Buddhist Tai Daeng (who consider themselves as Lao Lum) today remains an open question that deserves scholarly attention.

The Phong have a long tradition of weaving on upright looms, producing both Tai patterns and their own variations. Phong language for weaving related materials and concepts is a mix of borrowed and native terminology. They do not weave on the small back loom; in their conception, this is a lower form of weaving that is associated with the Khmu. The Phong generally do not live near the Khmu, a fact of which they are acutely aware. This is related to the fact that they prefer cultivating irrigated rice, which means they live in the foothills near rivers, landscapes that are conducive to water management. The Phong have several derogatory names for Khmu: *phteŋ* 'people of the mountain tops' (< T *phuu theŋ*), *ruuc* and *phreʔ/prɛʔ* are all explained as implying "backwards." The fact that there are multiple names with different social connotations suggests that there was contact in the past. Interestingly, there is not a high awareness or understanding of the Ksingmul who live in Xiengkho district on the Lao-Vietnam border.

In Ban Saleuy, people keep their language and ritual practices – even though Lao language, Buddhism, and weaving skills (arguably borrowed from Lao) constitute key markers of Phong "civilization" in contrast to the Khmu and other minorities. The Phong Piat subgroup living in Ban Saleuy reveals certain self-confidence and cultural pride – arguably a rare find among most Austroasiatic speaking groups in Laos. They explicitly refuse the Lao Thoeng category that is usually reserved for such groups. Instead, they consider themselves Lao Lum or at least Lao Phong to stress the difference from Khmu and Ksingmul.

Wet rice fields are conspicuously large even if the villagers also practice swidden cultivation as all village communities (also Lao ones) do in mountainous Houaphan. Other Phong settlements have fewer wet rice fields. However, the mere existence of such fields apparently suffices to claim Lao Lum status. According to the *nai baan* of Ban Saleuy, the yield from the rice fields does not last for the whole year (which is only rarely the case in upland villages in Laos, anyway) and that the households often rely on remittances from relatives in Vientiane to buy food. Moreover, traditional stories frequently use motifs of swidden agriculture (Phong Laan *plɛɛŋ leeŋ* and Phong Khami *ʔiəm leŋ*) as their basic setting, providing an interesting contrast with the lowland discourse of irrigated farming. Further confusing these cultural categories is the fact that collectivization of lowland agriculture in

Houaphan was significant enough to rearrange many groups farming practices and realign their ideas about what is traditional in their livelihoods.

As other communities in northern Laos during the civil war, the Phong of Ban Saleuy experienced division and conflict (see Lee 2018 for the prominent example of the Hmong; Évrard 2007 for the Khmu; see as well Pholsena 2013). This comes as no surprise as the Phong stronghold of Houamuang formed part of the northern front of Vang Pao's forces against the Lao communist base in Sam Neua (Ahern 2006: 234). When in 2019 we inquired about the – apparently expensive – construction of a new Buddhist temple, the vice headman flatly mentioned that the brother of a former village head had sponsored the project – from his exile in the USA. Apparently, two brothers of a local elite family found themselves on opposing sides in a fierce civil war. Such hidden histories often remain a bone of contestation in local memory discourses. Interestingly, the vice headman also mentioned the first visit of the 'lost brother' with his Phong-American family a few years after the inauguration of the temple, a big festival depicted as healing the wounds of the war. Large numbers of Phong were moved during the war to Sam Thong, and then to other places including Vientiane province, where some of the fieldwork for this paper was conducted.

6. Phong Linguistic Ethnology

The social identity of those known as Phong is ambiguous, as introduced above. The cultural identity of this group is also difficult to pin down, as there is no centralized source of authority, and the language has never been written down. In this sense, the Phong are a good example of the cultural and social fluid upland group. That said, sub-groups of the Phong have a strong sense of self-identification, of which language is a key element. Discussions of about the Phong language frequently include discussions about how other groups say things differently, and how that makes them closer or farther from other groups. Phong is spoken in an area of Houaphan that has a high diversity of languages spoken, so variation among Phong languages must be considered within a larger context of linguistic diversity, multilingualism, and cultural contact. In this section we look at linguistic evidence to help understand the complexity within the general Phong grouping.

The map below was prepared in the Austroasiatic linguistics project of 1996-1998, entitled "Languages and Verbal Arts of Ethnic Groups in Laos and Vietnam speaking Northern Mon-Khmer Languages", funded by the National Science Foundation[9]. The Phong area is illustrated by the P on the map, living now in the west-bank uplands of the Ma River and the headwaters of the Ca river, between Xam Nua and Xieng Khouang (Figure 3).

[9] Many thanks to Gérard Diffloth for sharing this map, and for on-going discussions about these languages.

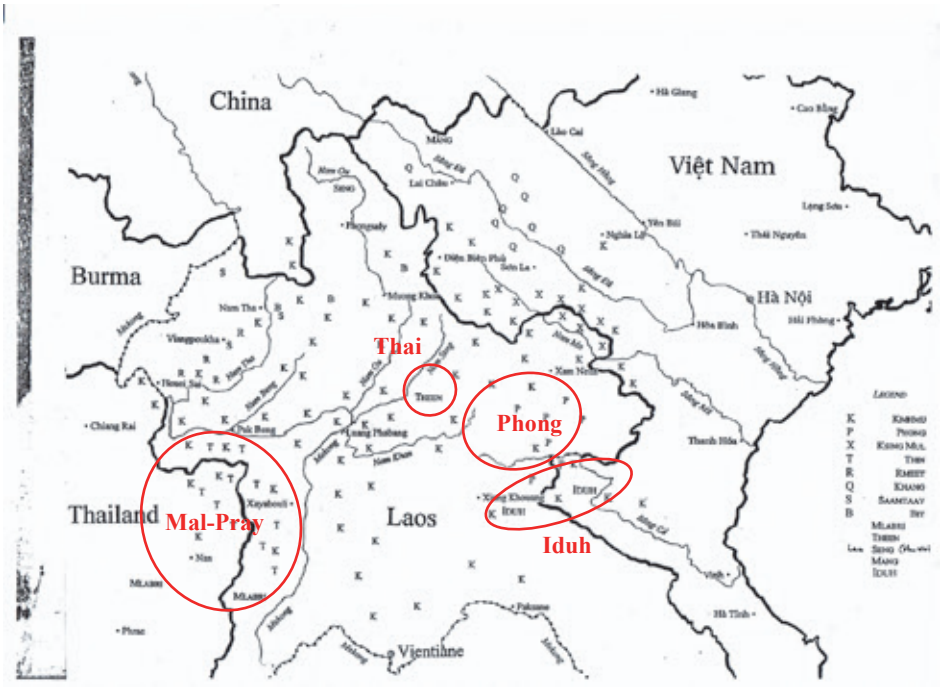

Fig. 3: Distribution of Austroasiatic-speaking groups using *pram* 'person'

Other *pram* groups include the Iduh in the upper Ca River basin on both sides of the Vietnam-Lao border, Thai Then living in the mountains between the Song River and Khan River in Luang Prabang Province, and the Lua' (Thin) people living on both sides of the Thai-Lao border, speaking varieties of Mal-Pray. These languages are all closely related, and it is hard to overlook the similarity of the Then/Thin names (See Badenoch, forthcoming). The *pram* groups form a loose band of distribution from Houaphan/Xiengkhouang, across Luang Prabang, Xainyabuli and into Nan province of Thailand. The Ksingmul, represented by X, are the people of the upper Ma River, and the Khang living in the Upper Black River. The Bit, who are distributed across the area from Dien Bien Phu to Luang Namtha, share cognate non-/pram/ ethnonyms (See Badenoch 2019) with Ksingmul (*psiiŋ/ksiiŋ*) and Khang (*tnraaŋ/khaaŋ*). Bit and Khang languages are closely related, and Ksingmul shares some distinctive and important characteristics with both (see Edmondson 2010). Mlabri live near the Thin on the Thai-Lao border and speak a language that has a particularly complicated history of close contact with Thin and Khmu, as well as being historically related to both further back in history (Rischel 1995). These groups live on the edges of a Khmu area that is centered around Luang Prabang, but extends through Phongsaly into China, northwestern Vietnam, and northern Thailand. The Mlabri ethnonym includes *mla?* 'person', which may be cognate with *mal*, the first element of the Mal-Pray, which is also found as an element in Phong Khami third person pronouns.

In the ethnically complex Houphanh area, we have a Pram group, a Psing group, and a Mal group, as well as Khmu. But as is often the case, the most common Phong reference to the Self is a form of the pronominal construction meaning 'us', or 'our group', using the borrowed Thay word *thay* 'group of people' and the Phong first person plural inclusive pronoun (Table 2).

Table 2: Phong First Person Plural Inclusive Pronouns

Phong Laan	thay ʔay	we inclusive
Phong Khami	thay ʔiə	we inclusive
Cepuang	thay ʔiə	we inclusive
Tapuang	thay ʔee	we inclusive

This normally refers to the members of the specific dialect group, for example *maay thay ʔiə* 'Phong language as spoken by a Phong Khami person', or *panmaay thay ʔay* 'Phong language as spoken by a Phong Laan person'. Because the pronoun is an inclusive form, it is not used with people from outside of the group, and therefore could never be used as an ethnonym more broadly.

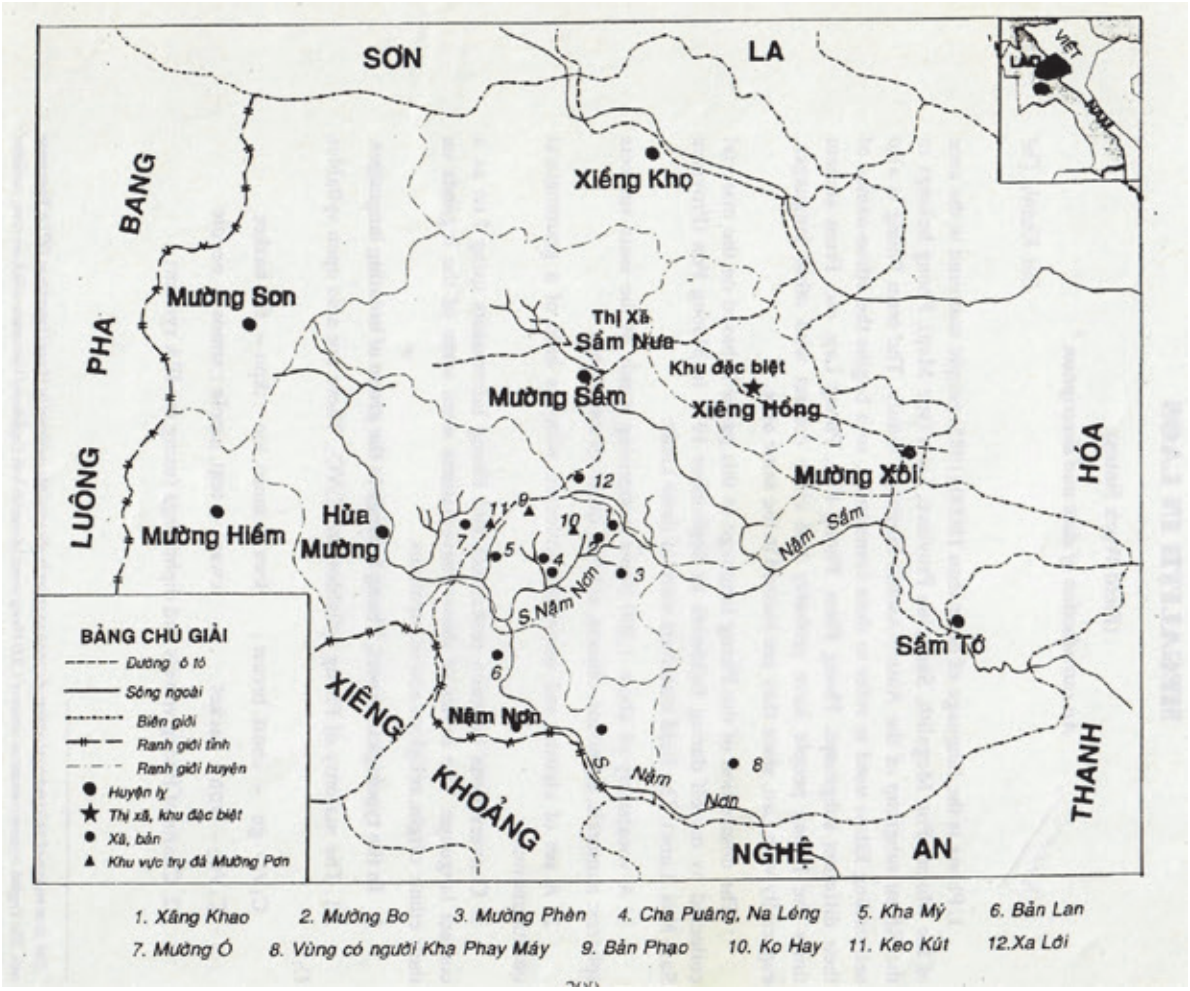

Fig. 4: Bui's map of Phong groups

Bui's map (Figure 4) shows Phong villages clustered mainly in the upper tributaries of the Nam Noen, to the east of Hua Muang and south of Muang Sam. Several village names that correspond with Phong linguistic varieties that are also used as ethnonyms identifying Phong sub-groups: 3 Muong Phen (*phɛɛn*), 4 Cha Puang (*cəpuəŋ* or *təpuəŋ*), 5 Kha My (*khəmii*), 6 Ban Lan (*laan*) and 12 Xa Loi (*səlәəy*). We can see Phong villages clustered along the tributaries of the Nam Noen River. According to the 2015 national census, there are 30,000 Phong living in the area. Bui's fieldwork was carried out in "Muong Pơn", in Lao Muang Peun.

Among Phong people there is an awareness of a larger ethnic identification above the dialect or village group. Reference at this level is made with *thay phɔɔŋ* or *thay pɔɔŋ thay phɛɛn*. The latter is a typical elaborate phase, where two similar words are paired with a common head to create an abstract or poetic sense. This gives the impression that there are two main subgroups in the Phong ethnic group. Folk ethnology collect supports this idea. Through discussion with people speaking different varieties of the language, there seems to be a general concensus that the large Phong group includes two main groups: one including Piat and Khami, and another including Phaen, Laan and Saleuy.

Sidwell (2014) proposes a four-way split within a grouping called "Pramic", including Tai Hat, a cluster of Laan-Phaen-Tapouang, a cluster of Kaniang, Piat and Saloey, and Tai Then. The Lua' (or Mal-Pray languages) are not included in this subgroup, as they do not share the same vowel development. As mentioned above, they do share the *pram* word for 'person'.

Looking at the Phong data summarized in Appendix II (including data from Kato 2014, Badenoch fieldnotes, Bui 1973 and Lagrèze 1925), there are two basic criteria that can be used for comparison to understand the internal diversity of the larger group: phonology (when the varieties share words, but they differ slightly in pronunciation, which varieties share the different forms?) and lexicon (how do different words for the same concept map to each other?). Table 3 presents data for 'head' and 'hair' in Phong varieties.

Table 3: 'head' and 'hair' in Phong varieties

	'head'	'hair'
Piat	**klii**	ksɔk **klii**
Tapuang	ʔoʔ	ksɔʔ **klii**
Pung	**kluu**	ksɔ? **kluu**
Phaen	ʔɔʔ	ksɔʔ ʔɔʔ
Laan1	ʔɔɔʔ	ksɔʔ ʔɔɔʔ
Laan2	ʔɔɔʔ	ksɔʔ ʔɔɔʔ
Khami	**klii**	ksɔk **klii**
BKT	ʔɔʔ	ksɔʔ **kluu**

Looking at 'head', there seem to be three groups: *kluu*, *klii* and *ʔɔɔʔ*. Phonologically, because /ii/ and /uu/ are produced in that same place in the mouth, but with rounded lips /uu/ and unrounded lips /ii/, we can say hypothesize a /klV/ Piat-Khami /ii/ group, a Pung group /uu/, and then a group with an entirely different word /ʔɔɔʔ/. We get additional phonological information from 'hair', which is a compound formed from 'hair'+'head' and see that BKT is also in the /uu/ group, while Tapuang is in the /ii/ group. We see that the Phaen, Laan1 and Laan2 varieties do not have the /klV/[10] word for 'head'. In fact, from other data we know that Laan2 does have the word in the /kluu/ form, in the word for 'top': *kluu blooŋ* 'top of the village' and *kluu leeŋ* 'top of an upland field'. We would hypothesize that *ʔɔɔʔ* replaced *kluu* in Laan2 in the main usage 'head (of the body)' but was retained in more idiomatic usages.

Depending upon Piat, we could possibly group them into two. Several other forms confirm this basic two-way distinction for the data we have (Table 4):

[10] Here /V/ indicates a vowel.

Table 4: Comparison of Phong data

	‘to drink’	‘to cough’	‘village’	‘name’	‘long’	‘to have’
Piat	**siəŋ**	**tuur**	**duəŋ**	**pnii**	**liəŋ**	**ʔuui**
Tapuang	**siəŋ**	**toor**	**duəŋ**	**pnii**	**leeŋ**	**ʔuui**
Pung	sɨin	tgəʔ	blooŋ	pnnuu	looŋ	ʔii
Phaen	sɨin	tgəʔ	blooŋ	prnuu	looŋ	ʔii
Laan1	sɨin	dgəʔ	blooŋ	rnuu	looŋ	ʔii
Laan2	sɨin	dəgəʔ	blooŋ	parnuu	looŋ	ʔii
Khami	**siəŋ**	**toor**	**duəŋ**	**pnii**	**leeŋ**	**ʔuuy**
(Bui)	sən	tgəʔ	?	?	loŋ	ʔi

The Pung variety lines up on the other side, however. Pronouns (Table 5) also provide both phonological and lexical support.

Table 5: Comparison of Phong Pronouns

	‘I’	‘you’
Piat	**ɲɔɔ**	**mɨɨ**
Tapuang	**ɲee**	**məə**
Pung	ʔaɲ	mɔɔ
Phaen	ʔaɲ	mɔɔ
Laan1	ʔɛɲ	mɔɔ
Laan2	ʔaɲ	mɔɔ
Khami	**ɲɔɔ**	**mɨɨ**
(Bui)	ʔeɲ	mɔ

Thus, we can observe the clustering of Piat, Tapuang and Khami in terms of shared lexical and phonological characteristics distinguishing this group from the Pung, Phaen, Laan and Bui varieties.

Phong Piat	Piat, Tapuang and Khami
Phong Phaen	Pung, Phaen, Laan, BTK

Discussions with members of these groups produce further subgroupings and theories about branching; for example, one Cepuang elder mentioned another group called *kdɛɛŋ* that broke off from the Cepuang. The name Cepuang/Tapuang is worth a brief discussion. The variation here is in the first syllable /tə-/ or /cə-/. These are may be redutions of the words /thay/ ‘person’ and /caa/ ‘subject’ (cognate with “kha” in the local varieties), in combination with a local variant of /phɔɔŋ/. If the /cə-/ can be traced back to the word /caa/, then this suggests contact with Tai, rather than Thay groups. (But see further discussion in section 7 with reference to Khmu.) Given the diversity of the Phong languages included here, it is likely that there is even more variation that could be studied at the interface of synchronic and diachronic analysis.

It is interesting to note that in the terminology used by speakers of these varieties, there is often an opposition including Phong and another of the varieties, where the speaker identifies their own speech generally as Phong, while the others are specified at Piat or Phaen. One exception is Laan, in which informants tend to identify primarily as Laan, and the rest are

Phong. It is possible that the term Phong has the sense of being the most legitimate variety, perhaps because of its social proximity to centers of administration. Nonetheless, the common *thay phɔɔŋ thay phɛɛn* framework suggests a social center-periphery with relation to the local administrative structures.

The name Saleuy is important in the meta-discourse of ethnicity and language among the Phong. A large road-side village called Ban Saleuy speaks a variety of Piat. The Saleuy are often referred to as a marginal group of Phong, but the reason is not clear. One Cepuang elder living in Vientiane, who first referred to himself as *thay səlɔəy*, but then provided data on the *cəpuəŋ* variety, said that Saleuy is the name of a larger group that includes Cepuang and other closely related groups, in line with the proposed Piat subgroup. As mentioned above, the Tai term *səlɔəy sək* 'captive, prisoner of war' seems like a feasible link. If this group overlaps with the Phong (as opposed to Phaen) then it is possible that *thay phong* could mean those people that were brought to live in or under the leader of the Phong, while the others remained further outside of the Tai political system. Returning to the colonial records, Lagrèze also commented that there were two groups of Phong; one group living around Sam Neua and one around Sam Tai. According to his records, the Phong group living around Sam Neua paid tribute to Vientiane, while the Sam Tai group were revolting against both, although we have not heard any verification of this.

The 1949 *Carte ethnolinguistique* shows this reality in spatial terms, and provides additional information on the larger linguistic ecology of the region. First, both Phong groups are labelled Thai Phong, as expected in the colonial record. Again, the use of Thai does not necessarily denote ethnic Tai/Thay, but can be a "people marking" word. However, they are colored coded as Tai/Thay in the scheme of the map, in yellow: this equates them with the others in this category such as "Thai Noir", "Thai Rouge" and "Thai Neua." The northern group of Thai Phong, around Houamuang, are completely surrounded by Mon-Khmer "Mou" (Khmu?) and "Phouteng," but within a ring of Thai Neua beyond which are the Tai Daeng and Tai Dam. The southern group of Thai Phong, are borded by an area of "Meo" to the east, but are surrounded mostly by the "Thai Neua." From this map one would hypothesize that the Phong of Houamuang would have been in contact with the Khmu and Thay Neua, while the more southern group would have most intense contact with Thay Neua, and possibly "Thai Phouen" (Phuan) and possibly Tai Daeng, depending upon the naturea of settlement to their east (Figure 5).



Fig. 5: "Thai Phong" shown in *Carte ethnolinguisique*

The geographic distribution of the Phong indicates different cultural contact scenarios at the time the map was drawn, suggesting the need for further work on linguistic contact, folklore and others oral traditions. The basic bifurcation of "Thai Phong" speakers provides a useful point of departure for a deeper probe of the internal diversity of the Phong.

7. Lingustic contact: Language in overlapping cultural worlds

Phong are known for being particularly flexible in terms of cultural identity, and are quick to "become Lao", hiding their backgrounds and abandoning the language. Evans (2000) has reported Taiization of the Ksingmul in Houaphan, claiming that they are in the last stages of becoming Tai Dam. Dress, housing, and language are common indicators of cultural shift. Many Phong healing rituals are conducted in Thay (*maay rii*), and some forms of singing have been borrowed wholesale, including styles and Thay language. Naturally, the modern Lao language has contributed to the lexicon of Phong and other languages in the areas of politics, socioeconomics, and popular culture (see Badenoch 2017 for contemporary "official" register of minority languages), but the time depth of cultural interaction between the Phong and the Tai/Thay is evident in the language.

Like many other Austroasiatic languages in Laos and Vietnam, the Phong have been under the linguistic influence of Tai groups for centuries. Their languages contain many borrowings from neighboring Thai languages. We can tell the length of time since borrowing, because the preserve the /r/ sound in borrowings from Tai that have since changed to /l/ or /h/ (Downer 1989-1990). Words like *rɛɛŋ* 'strong', *rɨə* 'sweat', *riə* 'to drop things' and *riit* 'customs' will be recognized in their /h/ form in Lao and other local Tai languages. The influence is often uneven as well, for example 'knife' is found as some form of *krɨɨy* in Phong Laan and Phong Pung, *raa* in Tapuang, Piat and Khami, but we find the Tai borrowing *miit* in Phaen and another Laan variety.

Borrowing of adjectives shows different patterns that hold systematically throughout the Phong varieties. Adjectives are interesting because they can be compared in terms of pairs of opposite meaning. The pairs are presented for Khami in Table 6.

Table 6: Borrowing of Adjectives

Native Austroasiatic pairs		**Borrowed Tai pairs**	
thick	*ban*	high	*suuŋ*
thin	*kadaa*	low	*tam*
new	*thmiə*	wide	*kwaaŋ*
old	*phrom*	narrow	*khɛɛp*
heavy	*kayəəl*	deep	*lək*
lightweight	*kayɨh*	shallow	*tɨɨn*

Even when there is variation in the native terms, they tend to maintain the consistency of borrowing/retention across pairs. For example, among the Phong varieties we find three etyma (*ban*, *tmɨɨl* and *ktɔn/ktən*) for 'thick', and two (*kdaa/gdaa* and *ŋnaa*) for 'thin.' All are native Austroasiatic words.

The semantic area of TASTE offers similar patterns. In all Phong varieties recorded, there are borrowed Tai words for 'delicious' *ɟɛɛp* and 'salty' *khem*, while the other taste words are of native etymology: 'sweet' *siəw*, 'sour' *sat*, and 'spicy' *tih/pray*. Again, it is interesting to note the variation in forms within the native lexicon. However, these large patterns hold across Phong varieties. When the correspondence patterns are this clear, and this regular, it can be hypothesized that the borrowing happened at the stage of the proto-language, in other words, before the varieties began to change.

Although there is not much clear evidence of linguistic borrowing from Khmu, cultural contact must have been common within the region. The Phong call the Khmu *təkaw/kəkaw*. This word is used to keep social distance from the Khmu, even in the face of geographic proximity. Knowledge of the Khmu is not lacking, as we have heard Phong explain that the Khmu refer to the Phong with derogatory terms; for Phong Laan *ɟɛʔ trʔaŋ* and Phong Phaen *ɟɛʔ trʔɨʔ*. The word *ɟɛʔ* is a general Khmu word meaning 'stranger, guest', used to refer to "Other" non-Khmu groups, including Lao and Tai, Hmong, Yao, Chinese, Vietnamese and even Westerners. The meaning of *trʔaŋ* may refer to the fact that the Phong Laan first person singular is *ʔaŋ*. As for *trʔɨʔ*, Suksavang gives two English definitions, 'not yet ripe or inhabited by insects (for pumpkins) and 'not quite all together (people). The Lao definition given translates as 'immature, unripe' or 'half-and-half, neither one thing or the other'. Moreover, some Khmu refer to the Phong and the Ksingmul as *ɟɛʔ puəŋ* (Suksavang et al. 1994), presumably a general reference to non-Khmu Austroasiatic groups of the Huapanh-Xiengkhouang area. As mentioned above, there is also phonetic similarity to the Phong subgroup Cepuang, which is another possible etymology and would suggest that this group was in closer contact with Khmu. The existence of two Khmu terms for the Phong is interesting, as it could reinforce the basic Phong-Phaen divide. However, this information was given by Phong people, and warrants detailed exploration with Khmu from Houaphan. It is worth reiterating that these binary constructions are extremely common, highly poetic in local languages and regional features shared across language families.

There is interesting evidence of the Phong sense of disadvantage within the trading system in Phong evasive ways of counting. It is common for Austroasiatic groups living in this region to replace their native numerals above three with Tai-Lao forms (Sidwell 1999). Some Phong groups have also devized an evasive counting system that is based on punning and other word play enabled by their fluency in Tai languages (Table 7).

Table 7: Evasive Counting Systems

	Ban Saleuy	**Diffloth data**	**Phaen**
1	baʔan	boʔan	baʔan
2	baarʔan	baarʔan	baarʔan
3	piəʔan	piaʔan	piaʔan
4	ksuut [bəksuut]	phon	ksuut
5	bəbiəŋ tiəy	bɯaŋ tɯay	bobiəŋ
6	bətiəy plaay baʔan	boʔ pʔua	tɨim baniiw
7	ɟiət	giat	tɨim baar niiw
8	bətɛɛk	tit	tɨim pia niiw
9	phrom	prom	prom
10	baar biəŋ tiəy	buʔvɯar	baar biəŋ

In the Ban Saleuy system, the first three numerals have Austroasiatic etymologies, followed by the general classifier *ʔan*. Other forms are descriptive constructions, such as '5' which means 'one hand', and '6' 'one hand plus one'. In the Phaen system, '5' is simply 'one side', and even though the word 'side' *bɨəŋ* is a Tai borrowing, its meaning is obscured using the Phong element *bo-* (or *ba-*) meaning 'one, single'. Some numerals are puns that play on the fact that speakers of non-tonal Austroasiatic languages often ignore the tones of Lao, or at least find this area of ambiguity as productive for a funny innovation; for example, '4' *ksuut* means 'iron poker', because the Lao words for 'four' and 'iron poker' are homophones if the tone is ignored. The same holds for numeral '9' *prom* 'old' in Phong, where the Lao words for '9' and 'old' are differentiated only by the tone. In the system recorded by Diffloth (pc.), which retains the old numerals from one to five, '6' is a play on the Lao word *hok* meaning both the number and a type of bamboo, in Phong *pʔua*. The differences between local versions of the system are minimal, but interesting, and show how linguistic resources are manipulated to create difference. Esoterogeny, the deliberate production of unintelligibility, may play a significant role in shaping language change as an indicator of shifting expressions of identity.

As secret number systems show, Phong play with the uncomfortable realities of multilingualism in an area where tonal and non-tonal languages are spoken near to each other, something done by other Austroasiatic groups as well. In doing this they put themselves down, recognizing the disadvantage of not speaking Lao natively. At the same time, they turn it around to create a means of communication that excludes the Tai and other groups. So far, this type of system is not known in Laan. If these numerals were devized as a way of enhancing their bargaining position, it might follow that the need was not so strong in Laan areas that were more distant from the centers of trading. A Cepuang elder once commented that the Laan were *prɛʔ*, the pejorative term used for Khmu, because of their backwardness. This shows the complexity of self-other distinctions in a world of overlapping cultural spheres and conflicting social aspirations. The number systems identify play, and particularly within language and inter-ethnic communication, as an important strategy for coexistence and survival.

7.1 The Languages of the French-Phong-Kha Dictionary

The local languages recorded in the dictionary are Phong and Kha. The system for representing Phong and Kha draws on spelling conventions of *Quốc Ngữ* orthography and is applied in a reasonably systematic way. As shown above, there is significant linguistic diversity within the Phong group. Kha is a reference in this case to the Khmu, another group that is quite diverse across Laos, Vietnam, China, and Thailand. The Khmu spoken in Houaphan and Xiengkouang are believed to make up one variety. The Khmu variety spoken in Xieng Khouang and Houaphan today is conservative phonologically, characterized by a retention of voiced stops /b, d, g, ɟ/, where in other areas these have changed to /p, t, k, c/ together with the development of pitch contrast. These sounds are recorded in the Kha (Khmu) data: buit 'alcohol' /buuc/, dạ 'at' /daʔ/ and gay 'to come' /gaay/. The Khmu variety maps reasonably well to the language that Suksavang et al (1994) call Khmu Cuang /kmhmuʔ cɨəŋ/, spoken in the area.

The question of the Phong variety used in the dictionary is more interesting. This variety clearly has a sesquisyllabic word structure, onset clusters, voiced and unvoiced stops, and finals /-l, -r, -y, -s, -h, -ʔ/. Vowel length is indicated less regularly, short vowels marked with the nặng tone. Most of the basic vocabulary is shared with other Phong varieties. Using the diagnostic list introduced above, with Piat and Phaen as representatives of the two main varieties respectively, we can get a general idea of the Phong variety (PHONG) recorded in this document (Table 8).

Table 8: Lagrèze PHONG with Piat and Phaen

	Piat	**Phaen**	**PHONG**
head	klii	kluu	cli /kli/
drink	siəŋ	s̈iin	sieng /siəŋ/
cough	toor	tgɔʔ	tuar' /tuər/
village	duəŋ	blooŋ	duang /duəŋ/
name	pnii	pnuu	pưn ni /pnni/
long	liəŋ	looŋ	lieng /liəŋ
to have	ʔuuy	ʔii	uy /ʔuy/
I	ɲɔɔ	ʔaɲ	nhia /ɲiə/

In this comparison, the PHONG data lines up with Piat. We can even get more specific, because within the Phong group, the vowel reflex for 'long' is Piat /iə/ and Khami /ee/, both contrasting with Phaen /oo/, indicating that this is indeed a type of Piat. There are some minor differences that blur the general boundaries; for example, 'soil, earth' Piat *ptiə*, Tapuang *tpɨi*, PHONG *th'pê* /tpe/. PHONG has reversed the initial ***pt-** to tp-, an innovation shown in only Tapuang and Pung (interestingly, in Badenoch fieldnotes Cepuang data it is pt-). The vowel shows some variation across dialects, further bluring that picture. A few other words are problematic: 'urine' *prơ ơm* /prʔəm/ is the common word across varieties, but in Kato's Tapuang and Badenoch's Khami it is recorded as /nom/, a word of solid Austroasiatic etymology ***nuum** 'urine' (Shorto 2006) shared by Khmu and others. This type of diversity is expected for small groups living in upland villages. However, it is also possible that there are multiple informants for the Phong-Kha dictionary.

From this analysis, it seems clear that the Phong of this dictionary is a Piat-type, rather than Phaen-type, with very close similarities to Kato's Piat, Badenoch's Khami and Kato's Pung. This finding provides some support to the working hypothesis that the Phong group was closer to the center of the Tai social system. If the French were planning to engage in some program of language development, it would make sense that they chose a variety with high prestige; perhaps it was geographic considerations, which would mean that a variety near to a center of administration was chosen.

7.2 The Phong dictionary in context: Planning for an alternative social space?

The Phong dictionary seems extensive for an apparently marginal group. According to Antoine Lagrèze, the French administrator who compiled the dictionary, the Phong "have neither script nor monuments", only a few legends such as the ones discussed below. Like their 'Kha'/Khmu neighbors, the Phong were considered on the way to progressive extinction (as argued by archaeologist Madeleine Colani a decade later, too; see Colani 1935).

In 1925, "Lao" was well established as the lingua franca in Houaphan but given that there were historical no speakers of Lao proper in this region, it is likely that "Lao" meant a Thay language, or perhaps in more generally the Tai-Thay languages that are spoken there. Thus, the French appeared to feel no need to communicate in Phong or Khmu languages. So why did Lagrèze started the project of a Phong dictionary in the first place? One trace could be the general trend of colonial knowledge production of that time. As Oscar Salemink points out in his seminal study on the ethnohistory of the Central Vietnamese Highlands (Salemink 2003; see as well Pels and Salemink 1999), the identification and description of distinct "races"

and their significance or challenge for colonial administration, was a main concern for colonial administrators.

The *Dictionnaire Kha Phong* by Antoine Lagrèze, *administrateur des services civils,* was in 1925 presented to Monsieur Dauplay, the Résident Supérior in Laos. Lagrèze mentions that the Kha and Phong know the Lao language, and their own languages are not particularly important for economic relations among groups. Lagrèze also describes the origin of these people as a mystery, particularly given the megaliths that exist in the Phong area. Because they have no writing, their own language is an important tool in understanding their history. Even at the time, the Phong were undergoing cultural change, including linguistic, as a result of contact with other groups. The adoption of Buddhism played an important role in this as well. Lagrèze was well aware that the Phong were part of a larger group of Kha that stretched far beyond the outer areas of Province of Sam-Neua. There is genuine academic interest in documenting a small and changing language, clearly related, but in an opaque way, to a larger indigenous language.

It is remarkable for a dictionary that includes a non-Tai/Thay language like Phong to emerge in such a substantial form from the French colonial archives. The colonial researchers in Vietnam produced much more information on minority languages, such as the comparative wordlists and ethnographic backgrounds published in the *Journal Asiatique*. Work in the Central Highlands of Vietnam first initiated by missionaries was integrated into the colonial administration in a way that was never seen in Laos. Although the context of this dictionary remains unclear, it does offer some insights on governance and social relations in colonial Houaphan. The choice of languages for the dictionary – French, Phong and Kha – raises a fundamental question about the motivations for the project. The lack of Lao language material could be interpreted as an indicator that Lao was marginal to the social setting in which this colonial administrator was working, or it could indicate an academic interest on his part, given that the origins and relationships of the upland languages were mysterious at those times (and continue to be in some cases).

The names of the languages are also interesting. In times when the puzzling and uncomfortable diversity of the uplands led to very conveniently general and ambiguous classifications such as Kha and Meo, this dictionary presents a Phong language and a Kha language. The Phong would have been known commonly as Kha Phong, putting them in the same broad social category as the Khmu. The Khmu, however, as a large group in the northern areas of Laos, were relatively well known, including some knowledge about Khmu subgroups. Why the Khmu would be called Kha in this otherwise detailed description is somewhat puzzling and suggests that politics may be a large force in the production of this dictionary.

In most colonial sources, the Phong are categorized as Kha for linguistic and physiognomic reasons. However, whereas the Khmu are depicted as miserable creatures, backward and uncivilized, Lagrèze describes the Phong in a more positive light: “They appear bright, intelligent, with regular traits and generally marked by great finesse.” Lagrèze emphasizes that their villages are well maintained and that the Phong have almost abandoned the “backward” practice of lacquering teeth, which is a cultural trait found in many Tai groups. They wear clothes and hairstyle similar to the Thay Neua. This indicates an ongoing process of mimetic appropriation. Tai/Lao titles (such as *phya*) granted to Phong notables constitute another example of this interplay.

Two factors might explain the interest of the French administration in the Phong. 1) The Phong are a demographic and economic factor in Houamuang district (e.g. as provider of forest products such as benzoin), and 2) they appear more civilized than other upland groups ("Leur degré de civilisation est plus élevé."), even holding politically influent positions as *tasseng* (subdistrict) chiefs in Houamuang (Song Khao village; see "Rapport general sur la situation de la province 1912-1913" by Commissar Lambert, 12 July 1913; ANOM RSL/D2). In addition, as Lagrèze notes in another report to the Résident Supérieur (1 March 1925; ANOM RSL/E4), Houamuang was plagued by poor local governance since the Lao/Tai notables were unreliable opium addicts – unlike the Phong (see Boutin 1937: 94 for an explicit reference to Phong abstinence). Given the French concerns with local budget, the Phong occupied a key position for economic and political reasons. Apparently, their discipline and reasonable administration, as well as their economic significance, made the Phong good colonial subjects in the eyes of the French.

The 143 pages of the dictionary are composed of two main sections – a general lexicon with alphabetized French headwords followed by Phong and Khmu glosses, and a large section organized by semantic fields. The second section also has words organized by parts of speech – commonly used verbs and adjectives, as well as grammatical notes and examples sentences. The material covered in the dictionary is wide-ranging, including basic vocabulary, culturally specific terminology, and administrative language. Sections such as Body, Disease, Family, House, Food, Vegetation and Animals are rich sources of native Phong words, with only minimal borrowings. These borrowings for the most part can be considered old Tai borrowings and are often shared among Austroasiatic languages across the region, as the reflect the general contours of cultural contact between upland and lowland groups. Other semantic areas, such as Administration, Industry and Commerce, Monks and Religion and Jobs and Professions, are almost entirely "Lao" borrowings, as they represent a much newer layer of cultural contact and borrowing.

The dictionary has separate sections covering French Administration and Indigenous administration. One impression is that the author was creating a resource to use in the integration of Phong and Khmu communities into the colonial structures. This could include local-language education, general awareness of administration and recruitment of local leaders for actual governance work. The dictionary can be seen as the first step in a program of 'language modernization', in which decision makers try to make a language more suitable for new roles in society. One strategy in language modernization is to coin new terms to fill gaps in the lexicon. There is very little of this done in the dictionary; the strategy is rather to borrow words from Lao and French. Because the Phong and Khmu have a long history of contact with Tai political and socio-economic systems, there is a tradition of linguistic borrowing. This is further facilitated by the fact that the Phong and Khmu phonological systems are not incompatible. Intense interactions between speakers of different languages can bring about the gradual harmonization of sound systems and grammars, creating a "linguistic area", where languages share many structural traits (Vittrant and Watkins 2019).

One area where the dictionary writers do intervene is in the creation of some abstract nouns. Austroasiatic languages typically have several ways of forming nouns from verbs, using prefixes and infixes. The meanings association with nominalization are specific, including instrumental and agent, for example. For example, Phong *prsak* 'thread' is formed by infixing -r- in the word *psak* 'cotton', while *trnɔɔk* 'rope' is derived from *tɔɔk* 'to tie' with an -rn- infix. Similarly, 'firewood' is formed by prefixing pn- to *ʔos* 'fire', to give *pnʔos*, 'language' is *pnmaay*, derived from *maay* 'to speak' and the same pn- prefix, and 'downward slope' *harɟuur*

is *ɟuur* ‘to descend’ with a nominalizing har- prefix. Affixes of this type are common, but they are usually not completely productive, which means that a speaker does not have free license to create new terms. To compensate for the perceived need to create more abstract nouns, the authors, or perhaps more accurately, their informants, have borrowed a nominalizing construction from Tai. The noun *khwaam* ‘word, matter’ can be used quite productively to create an abstract noun from an adjective, for example *khwaam suuŋ* ‘height’ < *khwaam* + *suuŋ* ‘tall’. In the implementation of this strategy, the Phong equivalent *maay* ‘speech, language’ is used; *maay saw* ‘sickness’ is created from *saw* ‘to hurt, to be ill’, *maay kaaŋ dee* ‘protection’ from *maay* + *kaaŋ dee* ‘to protect’. This can be done on Tai borrowings as well *maay muan* ‘enjoyment’ < Tai *muan* ‘fun, enjoyable’. In the dictionary, these forms occur together with an equivalent Khmu construction involving the word *hrlɔ?*, having the same meaning as *khwaam* and *maay.* It is possible that the Phong forms are motivated by the Khmu, as Khmu has been in historically deeper contact with Tai-Thay groups. This practice is continued today in the Khmu language of government radio broadcasting and is one of the markers of an ‘official register’ that is developing as means of communication of policy to the people in minority languages (Badenoch 2017).

Besides the relevance of the linguistic data for understanding subgroup identification, interethnic dynamics, and language change, Lagrèze’s manuscript also provides interesting examples of historical ethnography as the following sections will elaborate.

8. Historical Phong ethnography in colonial sources

The *Dictionnaire Kha-Pong* includes an ethnographic part that is unmatched in its detail. Neither Antoine Lagrèze’s colonial contemporaries nor present-day anthropologists have ever achieved to produce such a thorough account of Phong livelihoods and culture. Due to this lacuna, the ethnic category Phong largely remained obscure until the present day. Besides a few linguistic studies (Bui, Kato, Ferlus) we find only superficial notes in the works of Colani (1935), Källén (2015) and Tappe (2019). The entries in Jean Michaud’s dictionary (2006) and Schliesinger’s survey (2003: 236) remain sketchy and imprecise (sometimes even confusing the Phong from Houaphan with Vietic-speaking groups further south in the Lao-Vietnamese borderlands).

We have already speculated about Lagrèze’s interest in this particular group (or the stance of the French administration more generally). It seems very likely, that this was an issue of local governance. The ‘half-civilized’ Phong seemed to be trustworthy subjects in an upland region marked by lucrative forest products such as benzoin and stick lac, and by the emergent opium business. Given the French concerns with questions of local budget, an efficient governance of upland resources was arguably key for Houaphan’s economic sector. Yet the ethnographic part of the dictionary does not only focus on economic and political issues but gives an insightful account of cultural practices and social life such as religion and kinship relations – colonial knowledge production par excellence.

Interestingly, Pierre Petit (2020: 112) argues that this kind of ethnographic knowledge was largely irrelevant for the French administration who “(..) did not interfere much with the intimate aspects of the local society: law and order had to be respected, taes had to be paid and labor provided, but the administrators were not interested in the other dimensions of the villagers’ lives, or did not report them in the archives.” Lagrèze’s detailed account is an exception among the vast archival material stored in the colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence. This only confirms our assumption, that the French administration had a specific

gouvernmental purpose for the Phong (or specific Phong groups) in mind, for example as reliable intermediaries between the Lao elite in Sam Neua and the scattered upland populations further south.

The following ethnographic vignettes are all taken from Lagrèze's *Dictionnaire*. As an in-depth ethnographic field study has been beyond the scope of our respective research projects so far, these passages aim to provide an ethnohistorical background and inspiration for future researchers on Phong sociocultural lifeworlds. Unfortunately, Lagrèze did not leave any information about data collection and (with a few exceptions) specific localities. Thus, the question remains if the cultural practices observed were valid for all Phong subgroups. Not surprisingly, comparing these ethnographic accounts with present-day sociality and ritual practice will remain a considerable methodological and epistemological challenge.

Only recently, we have sent a translation of Lagrèze's account via whatsapp to acquaintances from Ban Saleuy.[11] Unfortunately, we received only a few bits of related information on the present ritual practice. Spirit ceremonies seem to remain an essential part of lifecycle rituals such as birth, wedding and death rituals. Our informants stress that by and large the ceremonies are held according to Lao 'traditions'. Perhaps most importantly, the 'sorciers' mentioned by Lagrèze have been replaced by *mo phon*, former Buddhist monks acting as ritual experts as in lowland Lao religious practice. In consequence, we use the past tense in the following historical-ethnographic account from almost one hundred years ago, with the caveat that it remains difficult to clearly identify this Phong group or groups.

8.1 Religion: Buddhist Kha and Resistance to Taiization

Lagrèze speculated that the Phong (like all Kha) showed "a tendency to leave their customs and even their religion". By this he probably meant certain animist ritual practices – "leurs antiques croyances". Only ten years later, French archaeologist Madeleine Colani (1935: 27) described the Phong as "a race close to extinction". Conversion to Buddhism and a lack of significant local material culture appeared as key markers for this tendency. Indeed, the Phong constitute a good test case for a process of sociocultural transformation that Grant Evans (2000) and Olivier Évrard (2019) discuss as Taiization or Laoization. Besides conversion to Buddhism – which already happened in precolonial times – the (mimetic) appropriation of Tai-Thay material culture, loanwords and sociopolitical structures exemplify this process (see Tappe 2018; Ladwig and Roque 2020; Jonsson 2010).

However, the Phong know specific cosmologies and ritual practices that until today distinguishes them from their Buddhist ("Lao Phut") neighbors. As in the case of Austroasiatic speaking groups on the Bolaven plateau (Sprenger 2018), conversion to Buddhism produces shifts concerning the temporality and spatiality of the ritual cycle but does not completely transform these original systems. Conversion to Buddhism did not lead to cultural assimilation, neither did the adoption of silk weaving from the Phong's Tai and Thay neighbors. Such cultural borrowings have been vernacularized and constitute key markers of Phong local identity today (see Tappe 2021; Évrard 2006, 2019; Bouté 2018).

Today as in the colonial past, the Phong have only a limited number of monks and novices. In Lagrèze's time the "sorcerers" were certainly more relevant for Phong ritual life (*mo phi* and *mo mun* in Lao/Tai languages; the dictionary does not include the terms sorcerer

[11] Thanks to Kaiphet Thipphavong (Sam Neua) for his unfailing assistance.

or diviner, though). For the present, a thorough ethnographic study of Phong ritual life is still pending. Thus, we will avoid too much historical comparison. However, some parallels can be drawn from simple observation: As in the past, the temples are the sites of the major village rituals such as the ones dedicated to the protective village spirit (*phi ban*). Ritual experts communicate with the spirit world, epitomizing the animist dimension in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious life in past and present Laos (see Sprenger 2016; Holt 2010; Ladwig 2015). Lagrèze called this syncretism an "éclectisme religieux".

Lagrèze wrote that every Phong village had a protective spirit who demanded an annual sacrifice on the occasion of New Year at the beginning of the rainy season (analogous to Lao *pi mai*). For three days the village was declared *khalam* (taboo) and no one was allowed to enter or leave the village. If a stranger entered the village, he was required to appease the angry spirits by offering pigs and rice wine. Lagrèze described the spirits as "assez capricieux", as ambiguous beings (cf. Århem and Sprenger 2016). For example, the spirits prohibited the Phong women to use treadmills. Therefore, they only used rice mortars by hand.

Lagrèze mentioned two kinds of sorcerers who took care of all spiritual issues: a 'big' sorcerer and a 'small' one. The latter was the first to consult in case of an illness which was considered as the agency of malevolent spirits (*mo* means doctor in Tai languages and refers to the close linkage between illness and dysfunctional sociocosmological relations; see Sprenger 2016; Stolz 2021). He sung himself into trance and asked the spirits who caused the illness what they demanded for leaving the patient's body. Usually, the sacrifice of a pig or chicken was required. If this did not work, the 'big' sorcerer came into play. He basically followed the same procedure but usually demanded a larger animal (e.g. buffalo). Sorcerers were highly respected notables and sometimes became village chief. They appointed and trained their successors.

Like their Tai and "Meo" (Lagrèze used this pejorative term for the Hmong) neighbors, the Phong believed in evil witches, called *phi pok* (perhaps a typo, meaning *phi pop* instead?). People feared them and usually chased them from the villages. They were not allowed to marry, as their children would become *phi pok* as well.

8.2 Life cycle rituals: Interface with Lao-Tai daily practices

According to Lagrèze's account, Phong religious life was marked by a ritual cycle from birth to death. The most important life cycle rituals were certainly birth, marriage, and burial. 'Sorcerers' assumed key roles in all rituals of Phong village life. Like Khmu ritual practice, rattan symbols (*taleo* in Tai languages) marked houses or even whole villages as taboo/*khalam* to visitors. This was particulary the case for houses where a woman was expected to give birth. Here, sorcerers invited benevolent spirits to protect the house against the invasion of evil ones. The good spirits were served rice liquor during the whole pregnancy (one bamboo tube every fifteen days). After birth, the umbilical cord was cut with a sharp bamboo spatula, the child was washed and wrapped in cloth. At once, the mother ritually fed her child with rice porridge. This reminds of the practice of many other Austroasiatic groups such as the Khmu and Rmeet (see Sprenger 2006a; Stolz 2021). The placenta was placed in a bamboo tube and buried, followed by a big feast including the burning of incense by the sorcerer for the spirits. Only after fifteen days, the young mother was allowed to leave the house.

As other colonial observers remarked on people in Laos more generally (see Ivarsson 2008), Lagrèze good-humouredly noted the laissez-faire attitude and easygoing morals of the

Phong. He described the premarital relations as 'liberal': girls of 14-15 years and boys of 20-25 years arranged rendez-vous – in fact through a secret opening in the thin bamboo walls by the girl's bedstead – that were usually tolerated by the parents. However, the boy was expected to offer a pig to the protective spirit of the house ("génie tutélaire de la maison"). If the boy had convinced his parents of proposing marriage, a complex ritual exchange cycle would be initiated: The parents sent two elders with rhetoric talent (*talent oratoire*; see Petit 2020 for the Tai Dam context; Lissoir 2017) to the house of the future bride in order to start negotiation. As token of respect, they presented following initial gifts: Two silver bars, two small knives, one set of betel, and some tobacco. Tradition demanded two or three rejections before the bride parents accepted the gift and offered a jar of rice wine (*law hai*) – essential component of any ritual exchange in Houaphan – in exchange. Sharing the alcohol, the two elders and the parents agreed on the marriage and fixed a date for the ceremony.

On the appointed wedding day, the groom sacrificed a chicken for his bride's house spirit. His parents sacrificed a buffalo or a pig – according to their wealth – and gave half of it to his future parents-in-law. Interestingly, the latter did the same in a kind of direct reciprocal way (yet also hierarchical if the sacrifices differed in kind or size). Thus, both parents contributed to the big feast where all village notables and commoners shared the food – a veritable community event. The groom brought a mattress/bed to his parents-in-law. The couple's wrists were tied together with thin thread reminding of the *basi* ceremonies of Tai/Lao ritual life (a common practice even today as confirmed by our Phong informants). After the meal, they were considered married. The couple spent the night in the bride's house before they moved to the groom's house on the next day.

The brideprice was fixed between 25 and 30 piasters (according to Foropon 1927: 48, a pig cost 15-20, a cow 25, and a buffalo 30 piaster). If the groom was too poor and could afford neither brideprice nor sacrificial animals, he had to stay with his parents-in-law and was expected to work on their fields until the final payment. If a girl was married against her will, she might have commited suicide with the poison of a specific liana. In case of premarital pregnancy, the boy had to either marry the girl or was expected to pay the equivalent of a wedding ceremony and the brideprice, and to supply for mother and child until the latter was able to walk. Polygamy was rare and only occured among very rich notables.

Death constituted another occasion of ritual exchange. The deceased was bedded up in the house with a cotton thread tied around his wrist (resembling *basi* ceremonies) and covered with best cloth. All jewelry was removed but a piece of silver was placed in the deceased's mouth. A coffin was made from a big trunk of a tree growing near the village. After the deceased had been put inside, a large feast started with all relatives, neighbors, and village notables (that is, the village community plus the extended family network; an activation of all relevant social relations). Unfortunately, Lagrèze did not give any information about eventual gift exchanges here.

For two days before the burial, Buddhist monks prayed for the deceased's soul. The sorcerer determined the location of the grave by dropping an egg. If it did not break, the place was not good. The coffin was placed in the grave with the head pointing towards the village. A small straw hut marked the grave similar to Tai burial practices (see Robert 1941 for the Tai Deng; today the Phong cremate the dead like the Lao do). Three days later, the family offered a plate with food for the deceased soul/spirit, afterward they did not visit the grave anymore. The wife/husband of the deceased inherited everything, or the heritage was divided among the sons (daughters only received food and were supplied by their brothers until marriage).

The soul/spirit of the deceased was said to move either to heaven or hell according to Buddhist cosmology. After two years in heaven (and longer if in hell in case of bad karma) the spirit returned and became a *phi heuan* (house spirit). House spirits were located in specific shrines with a wooden ladder (as in the case of the Tai/Lao *ho phi*). The fact that Lagrèze used the Tai term for spirit (*phi*), instead of the Phong expression *ruôy* (as mentioned in the dictionary), indicates that he probably did his interviews in Lao language and/or the Phong had harmonized their animist representations with the Tai ones.

8.3 House construction: Family, spirits and sivilai

Lagrèze noted that the Phong houses were built on piles like the Lao and Tai did (as the case today), albeit smaller and darker. In a village, all houses shared the same orientation. Building material (wood, bamboo) was collected in advance, as a house had to be built in one day starting with the first cockcrow. Choosing an auspicious location was a sensitive issue: People dug a hole and added two rice seeds that stuck together. If they still adhered to each other the following day, the location was acceptable. The Phong also chose an auspicious day for the date of house building, otherwise the inhabitants would face calamities.

When the house was finished, a selected friend from the village elders stood guard on the threshold. The owner of the house devoutly begged for entrance. The guard asked: "What do you want here?" "I come from the high mountains and bring blessing and wealth for this house." Only after some negotiations, the recalcitrant guard allowed the landlord to enter his house. He lit a fire and prepared tea which he shared among all family members after having taken the first sip. A few days later, he organised a big feast for the spirits (Lagrèze did not specify which ones; possibly the ancestor spirits) in order to invite them to stay in the house (as protective spirits). After that, the villagers divided up the meal.

A visitor had to follow a few rules in order to not annoy the spirits of a house and their hosts. He or she had to ask the landlord for an exact place to sleep (where the visitor must orient his or her head towards the outer wall). A Phong house had two spirit shrines: One dedicated to Buddha by the entrance, the other one for the protective ancestor spirits located by the landlord's chamber. To honor the host, visitors placed two candles (in pairs according to Lao Buddhist convention) on the first shrine. Luggage was not permitted to be placed next to the shrines and not permitted to be carried with poles (as this was reserved for transporting coffins). Raw meat was forbidden to be carried over the front stairs (reserved to men) but only over the back stairs reserved to women by the kitchen. Only the landlord was allowed to touch the shrines.

8.4 Mining and metallurgy: Extraction and sacrifice in the spiritual landscape

Colonial sources like Raquez (1905) and Lagrèze (1925) described the complex mining traditions of the Phong. The ritual and cosmological aspects deserve particular attention (for a rare study of mining and metallurgy in upland Laos see Évrard et al. 2016). As classic studies of the anthropology of mining suggest (see Nash 1979), mining activities are not only dangerous for questions of work security but also for the intervention of malevolent spirits. Miners penetrate the subterranean world and either disturb certain spiritual beings or enter a precarious relationship with them (through sacrificial gifts in exchange for the exploited mineral). Phong mining was a case in point (we could not trace any traditional mining practices for the present, though).

Near Sop-Poueng (location unclear) the Phong villagers practiced iron mining on a nearby hillside. According to tradition, mining activities were restricted to only nine days in the fourth Lao lunar months (cf. Raquez 1905). Large sacrifices (not specified here; probably buffaloes?) to the powerful local spirit were required, and the village was declared *khalam* for the mining period (besides, sexual intercourse is forbidden). Each family member was allowed to take two charges of iron ore per day (one charge was as much as one can carry; very young and very old people could not partake). The ore was taken to the village and buried in the ground for further procession.

Every three years, a particularly important ceremony for the spirit of the mine took place: Twelve piglets, twenty-four chicken, twelve ducks and twelve jars of rice wine were offered to the spirit (note the number twelve, an auspicious number in the Lao Buddhist calendar). The *khalam* period lasted for three months. Lagrèze's informants even stated that in the past human sacrifices happened, namely a young man and a young woman abducted from another village. However, Lagrèze reassured his readers that today the spirit was "less blood-thirsty" even if still so much feared that the Phong would not accept strangers in the vicinity of the mine. Permission from the spirit was required and visitors were not allowed to take away any mineral.

9. Focus on Mythology: Ethnogenesis and interethnic dynamics

The historical relationship between the Tai people and Austroasiatic speaking groups such as the Phong and the Khmu is addressed in numerous origin myths and legends. In Lagrèze's manuscript, the expression 'Tai invasion' is crossed out and replaced with 'struggle'. Indeed, using 'invasion' would be misleading as the Tai migration into mainland Southeast Asia entailed more complex interethnic dynamics than the idea of a conquest suggests. Historically, we can identify Tai vs. Kha conflict and competition as well as a 'symbiotic relationship based on both ritual and economic exchanges' between Tai and neighboring non-Tai communities (Grabowsky and Wichasin 2008: 11), and the uplanders' important socioeconomic position in specific localities (see Sprenger 2006b; Badenoch and Tomita 2013; Évrard 2019).

In the Phong sociocultural context, perhaps the most important and complex myth is the legend of the culture hero Hat Ang (Tappe 2021). One leitmotif of this myth is the close relation – exchange as well as conflict – between Phong and Tai, indeed emblematic for the ambiguous and dynamic Tai/Kha relation (for example see Proschan and Chamberlain (1992, 1986) for analysis of the Cheuang myth) This key myth of the Phong will be discussed in more detail below. Before we give all our attention to Hat Ang, other telling stories about Phong ethnogenesis and sociocosmological relations deserve closer scrutiny.

One story noted by Lagrèze goes as follows: There was once a "Pong country" (*pays Pong*) under the domination of Vientiane which demanded an annual tribute from the Phong (that is, the Phong being integrated into the *meuang* system). All Phong chiefs were required to bring the tribute to the court of Vientiane. One of them even received the Tai title *chao meuang* as token of respect and loyalty. This status was fixed with a large deed (Fr. *brevet*)

stored in a bamboo tube. The Phong *chao meuang* returned to Houaphan full of joy about the Vientiane king's benevolence. On the way he found the cadaver of a deer killed by a tiger. He decided to pick up the cadaver and transport it by using the bamboo tube as a pole. This idea turned out to be disastrous as the royal certificate slipped from the swaying pole (due to the sacrilegious use – to carry a cadaver – of the pole?).

Two Tai brothers who had accompanied the Phong entourage (perhaps also vassals but without *chao meuang* status?), took the document. When the Phong chief realized his loss, he was sad but also too careless to retrieve the document. Later, the Lao king passed away. His son was not familiar with all his subjects and demanded to see the respective royal patents as proof of privileged status. When the Phong chief arrived to bring the annual tribute, he could not meet the new king's demand. Instead, the Tai brothers produced the royal certificate and became the rulers of the "pays Pong". The disenfranchized Phong retreated into the mountains.

This story explains the hierarchical relationship between Phong (and Khmu) and the politically more powerful Lao/Tai people. It is not that important if the Tai brothers in the story are Tai (Daeng) or Lao/Thay Neua since both occupied dominant positions in different *meuang* of Houaphan in different times. It is also possible that the story dates to the times of Phong settlement in the Nam Ou region (with the court of Luang Prabang instead of Vientiane, and perhaps Tai Lü as the cunning brothers taking advantage of 'Kha' naivité). A key motif of this myth is the fact that the Kha originally enjoyed a privileged relationship with the court of Vientiane but lost this status due to ignorance. As we will see in the case of the Hat Ang myth, the opposition between careless Kha and cunning Tai/Lao is central to understanding this specific Tai/Kha setting.

Another telling myth is the "cycle of Sam Teu" (Sam Tai; in local dialect the 'ai' vowel /aɨ/ is realized as /əə/) as noted by Lagrèze and – three decades later – Deydier (1954: 5). The region of Sam Tai was once a vast forest. One day a prince from Vientiane (named Mun-Sam-Phan-Sam) went hunting in the area. He was enchanted by the beauty of the place and decided to establish a village (this refers to the first Buddhist settlement in Houaphan in the 16th century; see Lorrillard 2008). His father, the king of Vientiane, agreed and appointed him *chao meuang* of the new settlement. He also ordered that the prince collected tribute from the Phong who settled in the vicinity. His rule was harmonious until he passed away and his children took over. The Phong refused allegiance (as succession to the throne is always a critical time for ruling elites) and the payment of tribute; they also started a rebellion against Sam Tai.

Vientiane sent troop and the Phong withdrew to the citadel of Vien-Keo. The fortress was invincible as the Phong dropped rocks on any invader. When attack after attack went fruitless, general Chao Youn used cunning: He gathered 300 goats, attached candles at their horns and send them on the way up to the citadel. The Phong held them for the Vientiane army and wasted all rocks and arrows on them. Then Chao Youn easily conquered the citadel and the Phong surrendered. Due to the intervention of the *chao meuang* of Sam Tai, some Phong escaped captivity and were permitted to settle in the *meuang* of the Lao (as Lagrèze explicitly states). Since then, Lao and Phong entertained a friendly relationship.

As the previous story, the hierarchical Tai/Kha relation is addressed and explained. Moreover, a harmonious relation between Phong and Lao/Thay Neua in the *meuang* of Houaphan is maintained (in Lagrèze's time as well as in the present). The fact that the *chao meuang* of Sam Tai had pity with the Phong and allowed them to settle in the *meuang* hints at the significance of the Kha for the dominant Tai/Lao. It has been suggested that not only were

Kha well integrated into the *meuang* (Badenoch and Tomita 2013), their role in the economy of the *meuang* in fact contributed to its prosperity (Grabowsky 2009). Deydier (1954: 6) adds that the fallen Phong soldiers are now the protective spirits of the *meuang*, also indicating a necessary socio-cosmological relationship.

9.1 The myth of the sacred deer

This story noted by Lagrèze begins in Muang Lan, historical Phong stronghold and perhaps an early settlement of the Phong in Houaphan. Once upon a time, an evil ghost molested the Phong *meuang* (sic!) and killed everyone who crossed the ghost's path. When neither prayers nor sacrifices were of any help, the Phong decided to move away. For many days, 8,000 families sneaked through dark caverns ("entrailles de la terre") before seeing daylight again. By the exit of the caverns, a widow dropped a kitchen utensil which turned into a huge rock blocking the way. Those who were caught within the mountain had to die from suffocation. The remaining families collected water from all sources in the vicinity to cook rice. Then they poured out the water which produced the creek Hoay Chao.

The Phong built a bamboo raft and rode down the creek until the confluence with the Hoay Vek (a river in Houamuang District). They decided to establish a village. While clearing the area they discovered iron ore underneath. The Phong built furnaces and produced sickles and machetes. Since land for wet rice cultivation was limited, land distribution was a bone of contention. Within a fierce debate an albino deer emerged among the Phong. The deer did not resist captivity but, with a knife at his throat, pleaded in Phong language ("apparement un génie"): "Don't kill me, I am here for your good luck, follow me and I will show you the best place to establish a village." The Phong, afraid of the spirit (called *phi-cerf* in Raquez' version; Raquez 1905: 1481-3), obeyed and left their furnaces behind. In addition, the deer demanded that the Phong would never kill deer again if they achieve plentiful land.

Deer and Phong followed the Hoay Vek and reached Ban Na-San by the Nam Et River (no Phong settlement today). When the Phong suggested staying in beautiful Muang Aet with wealth of fish, the deer told them to move on. They passed Muang Ham and followed the Hoay Soy up to its source, while the Phong grew tired and begged the deer to stop. However, the deer persuaded them to move on. Many days later, having almost lost courage, the Phong reached the fertile plain of Muang Peun (interestingly, circle movement!). "It's here", qoth the deer and repeated the agreement that the Phong were not supposed to kill and eat deer anymore. Then the sacred deer disappeared under the Phong's cheers. The Phong established villages, remained independent for a while before they fell under Tai/Lao rule. Until the present day, the deer is considered a sacred animal, a food taboo (not confirmed by our informants today, though).

The myth of the albino deer mentions mining and metallurgy as practiced in the first settlement in Houaphan. Interestingly, this group of Phong left the potential source of wealth behind when the deer promised to take them to richer rice fields. The myth seems to privilege wet rice 'civilization' to other livelihoods. Indeed, traditional mining is a forgotten practice among most Phong communities today – and was perhaps only a marginal phenomenon in colonial times. Even if both Raquez (1905) and Lagrèze (1925) describe metallurgy practices in some Phong (and Khmu) villages in Houaphan, it is not unlikely that this craft remained unknown among other Phong groups (which would indicate different origins or at least historical trajectories of migration and ethnogenesis).

Deer also make an appearance in the Hat Ang myth, yet only in Plunian's (1905) version. The version from Lagrèze's manuscript omits this detail. Plunian notes that Hat Ang used a magical awl to produce human beings from the ground (Plunian 1905: 128). However, at first a flock of deer appeared when Hat Ang drove the awl into the ground. This mythical element suggests a common origin of humans and deers since both were produced from the ground through Hat Ang's magical tools. According to Plunian, this is the reason for a kind of 'totemic' relationship between the Phong and the deer that is marked by the hunting taboo mentioned above (ibid.: 130).

Many of the key elements in thes myths appear in the legend of Hat Ang. This myth is a particularly detailed account of the ambiguous Tai/Kha relation and functions as explanatory model of present-day power asymmetries. Not surprisingly, the story of Hat Ang seems to be the most popular Phong tale as it was noted by different sources in different times.

9.2 The myth of Hat Ang

An analysis of the myth of Phong culture hero Hat Ang adds fresh perspectives on upland ethnogenesis and sociopolitics in upland Laos (see Tappe 2021). Local mythology can be used as tool to explore the history of the Tai/Kha relationship and to investigate the role of upland people in shaping this relationship. Besides functioning as an explanatory model for the present-day marginality of upland peoples (cf. the myth of the money tree of the Austroasiatic-speaking Rmeet; Sprenger 2006a/b), the myth of Hat Ang offers a host of interesting detail and ethnographic information: historical origins, pioneering mobility, kinship, exchange, ethnic stereotypes, cosmology etc.

Different versions of the myth of Hat Ang have been noted down by Alfred Raquez (1905), the colonial administrators Adolphe Plunian (1905) and Antoine Lagrèze (1925), archaeologists Madeleine Colani (1935) and Anna Källén (2016), and former EFEO director Henri Deydier (1954). At present, the myth still forms part of local oral traditions in some Phong villages (Tappe 2021).

The following version was included in Lagrèze's *Dictionnaire* – an almost verbatim reproduction of Raquez's (1905) version. It suggests a close yet ambivalent Tai/Kha relationship: A Lao princess from Vientiane found an enchanted fruit (*mak san*) in the Mekong, ate it, became pregnant, and finally gave birth to a boy – Hat Ang – who cried day and night. Neither the midwives nor the doctors nor the diviners were able to find out the reason. One day, a Phong man travelled down the Nam Ou and the Mekong to visit Vientiane (Luang Prabang in other versions, indicating contested Lao sovereignty since the early 18th century; it is also not unlikely that the Phong's counterpart is Tai Lü given the historical origins of the Phong in the Nam Ou valley where the Tai Lü held local political sovereignty). When he gave a *mak san* to the boy, the royal offspring stopped crying. The king took this as heavenly sign and offered his daughter's hand to the Phong man.

The young couple moved to Don Chan (a sand bank near Vientiane), where they tried in vain to establish swidden fields (*hai*) in the nearby hills. Each time the Phong man cut the trees, they reappeared by the following morning. The Lao king blamed the Phong for the couple's misfortune and accused him of being a malevolent spirit. He forced the couple into exile, up to Houaphan. Here the present-day settlement of the Phong in Houaphan is clearly the result of a failed 'Tai/Kha' relationship, with Hat Ang's father being a kind of outcast, associated with malevolent spirits.

Even if the myth articulates the upland-lowland divide between the upper Nam Ou and Luang Prabang/Vientiane, relations, and interactions at first suggest a common Tai/Kha social space, a "space determined by the set of the systems of relations characteristic of the group concerned" (Condominas 1990: 1). The myth describes an early alliance between Lao and Phong through the story of the Lao princess eating an enchanted fruit coming from the uplands (Plunian's version even suggests that the Phong man himself had enchanted the fruit; Plunian 1905: 126). The princess's marriage with Hat Ang's "Kha" father remained an ambiguous one, though. The different versions of the myth indicate more or less forced exile instead of a shared Lao/Phong space – a disruption of the affinal relationship across ethnic differences, here between Hat Ang's father and his Lao affinal relatives.

The Raquez/Lagrèze version fast-forwards and describes the grown-up Hat Ang as an ambitious leader of a veritable upland *meuang* – the "royaume des Pong" according to Lagrèze. Hat Ang received "instruments bizarres" (Raquez 1905: 1399) from a powerful spirit: A double-faced gong, a hoe with a diamond blade, and an iron awl. With the help of the awl, Hat Ang could produce a water source from sheer rock and make fire (a clear reference to upland swidden cultivation; see as well Badenoch 2020). With the hoe, he could break rocks. By hitting the gong, he was able to summon protective spirits.

Holding powerful magic tools, Hat Ang was at the top of his authority. After having accepted the rule of the lowland Lao king for a long time, the Phong now saw the chance to throw off the yoke of Lao rule and withdrew their allegiance. The Lao king sent an army but was beaten by the Phong, thanks to their spiritual support. The Phong kingdom flourished, and Hat Ang became a king recognized by "heaven" (Raquez 1905: 1400).

In the heat of one summer day, people were resting in the shade when a hawk (ibid.) or marten (Lagrèze's version) invaded a henhouse, provoking quite some uproar. The Phong confused the turmoil with an armed attack from the Lao and, in a panic, hit the gong. The troops went to arms but saw nothing but the escaping animal with a chicken in its fangs. The spirit resented this sacrilege and demanded back the misused gong. Hat Ang obeyed and his people lost confidence due to the divine anger (even if they were able to keep the remaining instruments, but had no support from the deities anymore, this was a disruption of a critical cosmological relationship).

Hat Ang, although being of mixed Tai/Kha origin, is clearly categorized as an uplander, as the offspring of an exiled couple and as the founder of an upland kingdom. Through emulating the Lao *meuang* with temples and a palace, he seems to challenge the authority of the lowland Lao – not least thanks to magic/sacred (Lao: *saksit*) tools granted by powerful spirits. The magical instruments are a key theme of the myth: the gong, the awl and the hoe refer to functioning cosmological relations, manpower and natural resources, all of them key to agricultural subsistence and social reproduction.

All versions agree that Hat Ang had created a prosperous Phong kingdom, a genuine mountain *meuang*. According to the Raquez/Lagrèze version, however, after the Lao king had learned about the loss of the gong, he decided to steal the remaining tools. He sent his son to win the heart of Hat Ang's daughter. Hat Ang was very pleased about the charming prince's proposal and accepted the marriage. Everything went well until the devious prince took the magic tools and threw them into a volcano. In addition, he talked Hat Ang into building a high wooden tower so that the Phong king and his entourage could watch the beautiful city of

Vientiane or Luang Prabang, respectively (according to different versions of the myth; see Tappe 2021). When Hat Ang and hundreds of Phong climbed the tower, the prince set fire to the wooden construction. As if this wasn't enough, the Lao prince chased the Phong people into ravines and streams; only a few of them – "Les débris de la race pong" (Raquez 1905: 1401) – made it to the mountains.

Here, in addition to the loss of divine support due to disruptions of sociocosmological relations (and, previously, the affinal relation to the Lao court), the element of lowland Lao cunning is introduced as an explanation for the decline and inferiority of the Phong civilisation. This contrasts with the Rmeet myth described by Guido Sprenger (2006a/b), where the people cut the tree of money so that the precious fruit ended up in the lowlands – necessarily so because the tree was overgrowing villages and fields. Even if both myths suggest an asymmetric 'Tai/Kha' relationship, aspects of upland agency and aspirations differ (see as well O'Morchoe 2020 on the ethnohistory of the Lahu).

In the Hat Ang myth, kinship remains a key issue. By the time he received the *saksit* tools in the Raquez/Lagrèze version, Hat Ang had become an established upland ruler and a potential candidate for lowland *meuang* patronage – e.g. as a border guard, as a provider of forest products, and indeed as a partner for marital exchange: as the history of Laos and Thailand reveals, kings used to assemble a large number of wives and concubines, many of them tokens of loyalty and respect from lower ranking notables or even other leaders (both Tai and non-Tai; cf. Condominas 1990; Grabowsky and Wichasin 2008).

The (asymmetric) interethnic relationship between Tai/Lao and Kha is the leitmotif of the myth: after Hat Ang – himself being of mixed Tai-Kha origin – established a kingdom in the uplands, the Lao king defeated him with cunning and left a scattered population. From the perspective of the Phong, this is a tragic story reflecting their bygone glory and traumatic decline. Contrary to James Scott's (2009; cf. Jonsson 2014, 2017; Tappe 2019) interpretation of purposefully stateless "Zomian" societies, the Phong interpret statelessness as loss and the result of lacking intelligence and over-ambitious aspirations. Hat Ang's magically supported political power notwithstanding, the cunning and intelligence of the lowlanders took advantage of Phong myopia and hubris, in order to defeat them.

Another short myth (Badenoch 2020), from the Phong Laan, describes the cultural interactions between the Thay and Kha worlds. In this story, humans betrayed the animals by cheating in a competition to demonstrate the special powers (*lit deet*) that each had. The power of the human was to cause fire. He set fire to the forest, which changed forever the relationship between humans and the animals. It also created ongoing antagonism with the Ngueak, or spirit of the underworld. While the "natural" order was overturned by the human use of fire as a technology of livelihood, the moral implications of the story are asserted using Thay Buddhist terminology and motifs.

The perspective of Person is told using numerous poetic devices that are shared across languages in the region, as well as nuances that are transparent only within the Phong context. For example, the animals switch from using the intimate second person plural pronoun before the betrayal, but switch to the singular more distant form after the fire has been set. Although the main actors in this legend are Person, Animals and Ngeuak, there is a Thay/Kha understory running throughout, touching on topics such as *meuang-pa* (civilized and wild space), livelihoods (settled agriculture hunting-gathering and swidden agriculture), as well as interaction between local spirits and larger Indic spiritual references. This myth demonstrates

how the simple dichotomy of Thay/Kha is really a more dynamic cultural complex that involves language, morality, and ecology.

10. Cultural intimacy, language and the making of local hierarchies

Ethnolinguistics and (oral) ethnohistory constitute two approaches for investigating ethnogenesis, interethnic dynamics and processes of ethnic change. Venturing in the past of societies without script is a precarious task, though. Analyzing language and oral traditions in combination enables fresh perspectives on sociocultural dynamics in a multi-ethnic setting like Houaphan in NE Laos (see Petit 2020). Studying mythology and ethnolinguistic phenomena helps understanding the complex entanglements in multi-ethnic contexts. Both approaches highlight processes of linguistic and cultural borrowings, mutual mimetic appropriations, and a history of complex relationships beyond a simple Tai/Kha antagonistic binary. Therefore, this working paper aims to complement – or, rather, encourage in the first place – the indispensable ethnographic inquiry in present-day Phong communities to better understand cross-cultural dynamics in upland Laos.

In 2014, an old man told the story of Hat Ang – in a much shorter version than those discussed above, and amidst much discussion and laughter. The smiles of the other villagers in Ban Pa Cha shifted between enjoyment about sharing a good story – magic tools! – and embarrassment about telling a foreigner about the Phong's historical defeat and present-day marginalization. Characterizing the Lao as deceitful and morally corrupt was also a sensitive issue as indicated by the lowering of voices. The old Phong man briefly commented that Hat Ang once built a city that was destroyed by the jealous Lao, the debris now constituting the standing stones of Hintang (to the disagreement of the village headman). Indeed, unlike the colonial versions, most Phong today do not consider the Hintang megaliths as remnants of Hat Ang's palace. As archaeologist Anna Källén (2016) confirms, the Phong deny indigeneity or any connection to the prehistoric site. Instead, they stress the historical origin by the upper Nam Ou and the corresponding relationship with the Lao (or Tai Lue?) court. The Phong Laan people who were moved to the Vientiane area during the war claim that they originate from a place called Laan Xieng. The name of the last son of Tao Khun Lo, himself the son of the first Tai Dam ancestor to descend from the heaven, was Laan Cheuang (Chamberlain 1992). The historical sound changes needed to produce Xieng from Cheuang are not rare. This may be another Phong claim to elite descent, bridging the heavens and earth, as well as Tai and Kha, although such a Tai Dam link may be a counter-current to the proposal that the Phong were not in close contact with Tai Dam and Tai Daeng people.

Arguably, *meuang* relations are more significant for Phong identity than any "Zomian" exaggerations of difference. Phong ethnohistory and linguistic evidence force us to rethink schematic interpretations of the Tai/Kha binary. This relation is dynamic and contingent. It is further complicated by the internal cultural and linguistic diversity of the Phong ethnic category – as actually in the case of many other Austroasiatic groups such as the Khmu – that is very much linked to historical trajectories of migration, conflict, and exchange in the multicultural setting of upland Laos. Critical to this proposal is the recognition of the ethnolinguistic boundaries that exist within the world that is often refered to simply as "Tai."

The internal linguistic diversity found within the Phong language is the norm, rather than an exception for ethnic groups in the uplands, from Houaphan to the upper Nam Ou. This challenges our simplistic ideas of clear and clean mappings of a language to an ethnic group. As we have seen with the Phong, neither has cut-and-dry boundaries or definitions when

examined from the inside out. Yet, looking seriously at this linguistic variation can give important hints about not only the history of an imagined community, but of a region that has multiple imaginings that sometimes overlap and sometimes contradict each other. But in the case of the Phong, there is a sense of group solidarity within the people that call themselves 'we people' and others known by different names. The term Phong, seems to have its origin in a toponym or level of governance, but provides a sense of political ethnicity, even as an exonym. The term K'niang, although heard in many places, does not present itself as the compelling "autonym", and unlike the Khmu and others, they have not adopted a native form of the word 'person' as an ethnonym.

This must be related to the fact that the Phong do not "fit" into the local social structure as it has been understood to date. The Phong cannot be placed comfortably within the system abstracted by Condominas, and by the same token, the ethnoscape hierarchy as they explain it requires a view of history that has not made it, despite the efforts of people like Lagrèze, out of the oral realm into the accepted realm of "official" written history. Their history is wrapped up with a larger social history of Austroasiatic people and their movements around landscapes now dominated by Tai versions of history. The linguistic ideologies of these people are hidden by the fact that they often speak Tai languages well and are adept at participating in cultural norms. Their skill at "cultural shapeshifting" may account for the fact that the *Carte Linguistique* (1949) listed the "Thai Phong" as being Tai speakers (Chamberlain 1986). Nonetheless, they maintain "difference" from others as a way of being in these larger social structures. Even as they assert a higher civilizational rank because of their Lao-influenced Buddhist ways, their linguistic strategies to innovate counting systems to bolster their position in negotiations with other Tai peoples suggest that the power relations in these multiethnic mosaics are complex and dynamic. The closest identification within local society is with the "outsider" Thay people they call *rii*. In other words, the *rii* are the farthest from their Austroasiatic heritage, yet the closest in terms of their own image of their position in the local hierarchies. By extending this hierarchy to the local frame of interethnic relationships imposed by the neighboring Tai polities, they build a social ladder of identification to reorder their world. From a methodological point of view, working in multiple local languages is esstential to piecing together these relationships. While the Phong Lao-language narratives tend to use the word "Lao" in speaking of the cultural influences they have taken on, in Phong languages such as Laan, the phrase *ʔarii-ʔalaaw*, which we can translate as 'Thay and Lao', shows a finer set of identifications and relationships within the Buddhist world they know.

Neither Tai nor Kha, nor Lao, the Phong may have seemed a promising group through which they could govern the less accessible areas outside of Sam Neua. Currently, intimate knowledge of Khmu language seems minimal or non-existent among the Phong, and there is no record of their linguistic practices prior to the French. Their oral memories stress a "Lao" connection, which would keep them above the Khmu in the local social hierarchy. Yet their position between the animist Tai and the Buddhist Thay of the region upsets such a hierarchy. More research is needed on Phong culture as practiced today by the diverse sub-groups to understand the range and depth of influence from different Tai and Thay groups: What animistic elements of Buddhist practice exist and how to they reflect cultural contact? What patterns of multilingualism exist in the present and past? How might borrowed words and grammatical structures shine a light on multiple sources of linguistic influence? How do narratives of Self and Other index historical interethnic, and possibly intraethnic relations in the Phong world?

So, why the French-Phong-Kha dictionary? Aside from being an interesting work of ethnography and language documentation, did the French see a way of taking advantage of the Phong liminal position within the local landscape, which spoke to loftier conceptions of governance and local identity? Regardless of our interpretation of this possibility, the Phong present an alternative angle from which to question the regional structures of power, identification, and memory, while at the same time deepening our understanding of how language and legend shape ethnically diverse environments.

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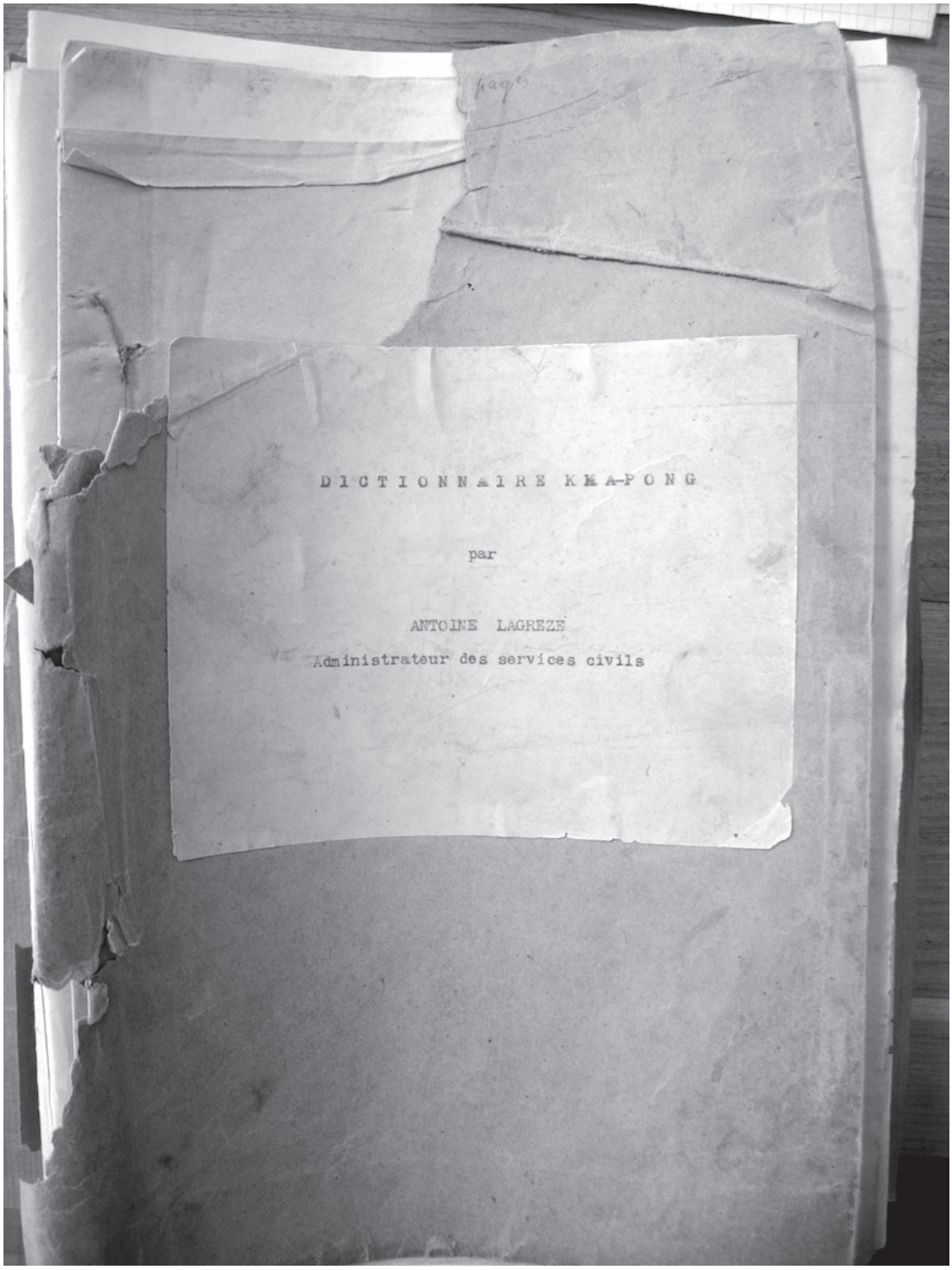
Appendix I

Sample pages from the 1925 *Dictionnaire Kha - Pong* compiled by Antoine Lagrèze (Fonds de la Résidence supérieur au Laos, Série Z, Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, FR ANOM RSL/Z)



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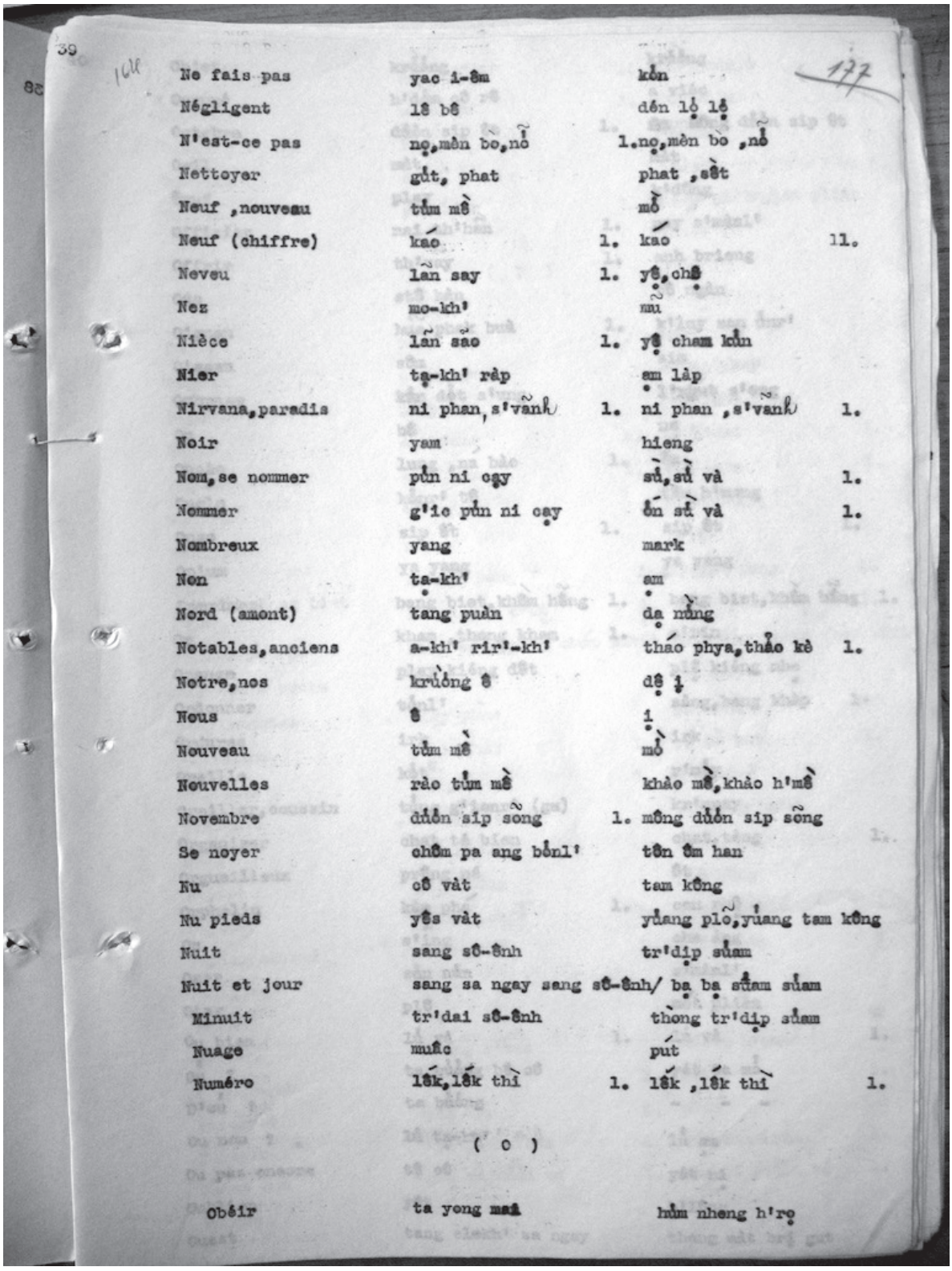
137

Deuxième partie

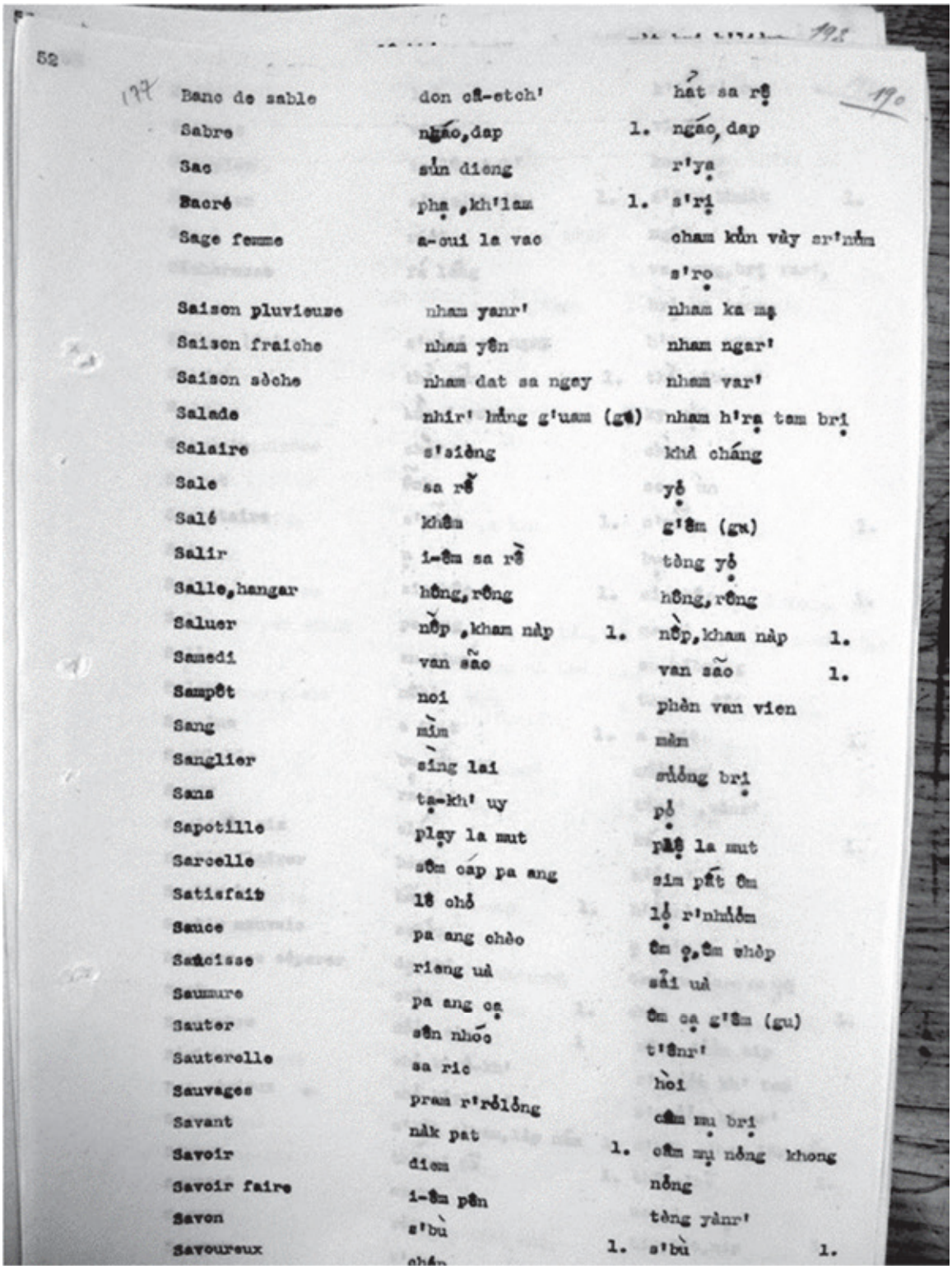
Français	Phong	Khả	
88			
	(A)		
Abaisser	ât loc ỏng	anh r'yun	
Abandonner	vang dô-kh'	pitch'	
Abaque	kuân khìt	lúk khìt	1.
Abeille	yâu bùt	mạ ph'rỏng	
Abimer	tray i-êm	tèng pitch'	
Abondant	bun uy s'kun	ạ mark	
D'abord	tè kinl'	dỏm, kòn	1.
Aboyer	trô-h' (ou trô-kh')	kuànl' (ou kuànr')	
Abrégé	kết-ch'	nhẹ	
Abri public	sã la 1.	sã la	1.
Abriter	cô kỏn dỏt	l'ngút	
Absent	tạ-kh' cộ	ạm yàt	
S'abstenir, se retenir	ôt yem	ôt r'nhủỏm	
Accepter	ràp	làp, ràp, hàp	
Accident	hết vang	hết rấy	
Accompagner	mủnr' tru	yọ s'rồng	
S'accorder	t'vàu nè	làu mèn yọ	
Accoster	chỏt 1.	chỏt	1.
Accoucher	lô-kh' kuân	ạ con	
Accrocher	kọ dê	vác unl'	
Accuser	fóng và, hã và, chỏt và 1.	fóng và, hã và, chỏt và	1.
Acheter	lék	vét	
Achever	tu-h' i-êm	tèng lô-itch'	
Achevé	tu-h'	môm (ou lô-itch')	
Additionner	t'rôm lếk	ruốp lếk	
Adieu	chi mủnr' day	sam barat kan	
Adjoint	phủ (ou mạ na) chòi	phủ suày	1.
Administrateur	mạ na t'bien kan	phủ chat kan, phủ và - hats' kan	1.



Ne fais pas	yac i-êm		kỏn	
Négligent	lê bê		dén lọ̀ lẹ̀	
N'est-ce pas	nọ,mèn bò,nỗ	1.	nọ,mèn bò ,nỗ	
Nettoyer	gủt, phat		phat ,sèt	
Neuf ,nouveau	tủm mề		mồ	
Neuf (chiffre)	káo	1.	káo	11.
Neveu	lãn say	1.	yệ,chệ	
Nez	mo-kh'		mũ	
Nièce	lãn são	1.	yệ cham kủn	
Nier	tạ-kh' ràp		ạm làp	
Nirvana,paradis	ni phan, s'vãnh	1.	ni phan ,s'vãnh	1.
Noir	yam		hieng	
Nom,se nommer	pủn ni cạy		sủ,sủ và	1.
Nommer	g'ic pủn ni cạy		ổn sủ và	1.
Nombreux	yang		mark	
Non	tạ-kh'		ạm	
Nord (amont)	tang puàn		dạ nủng	
Notables,anciens	a-kh' rir'-kh'		tháo phya,thảo kè	1.
Notre,nos	krủồng ê		dệ ị	
Nous	ê		ị	
Nouveau	tủm mề		mồ	
Nouvelles	rào tủm mề		khào mề,khào h'mề	
Novembre	dủồn sip sõng	1.	mông dủồn sip sõng	
Se noyer	chôm pa ang bồnl'		tôn ôm han	
Nu	cô vàt		tam kông	
Nu pieds	yês vàt		yủang plõ,yủang tam kông	
Nuit	sang sô-ênh		tr'dịp sủam	
Nuit et jour	sang sa ngay sang sô-ênh/ bạ bạ sủam sủam			
Minuit	tr'dai sô-ênh		thòng tr'dịp sủam	
Nuage	muâc		pút	
Numéro	lếk,lếk thì	1.	lếk ,lếk thì	1.

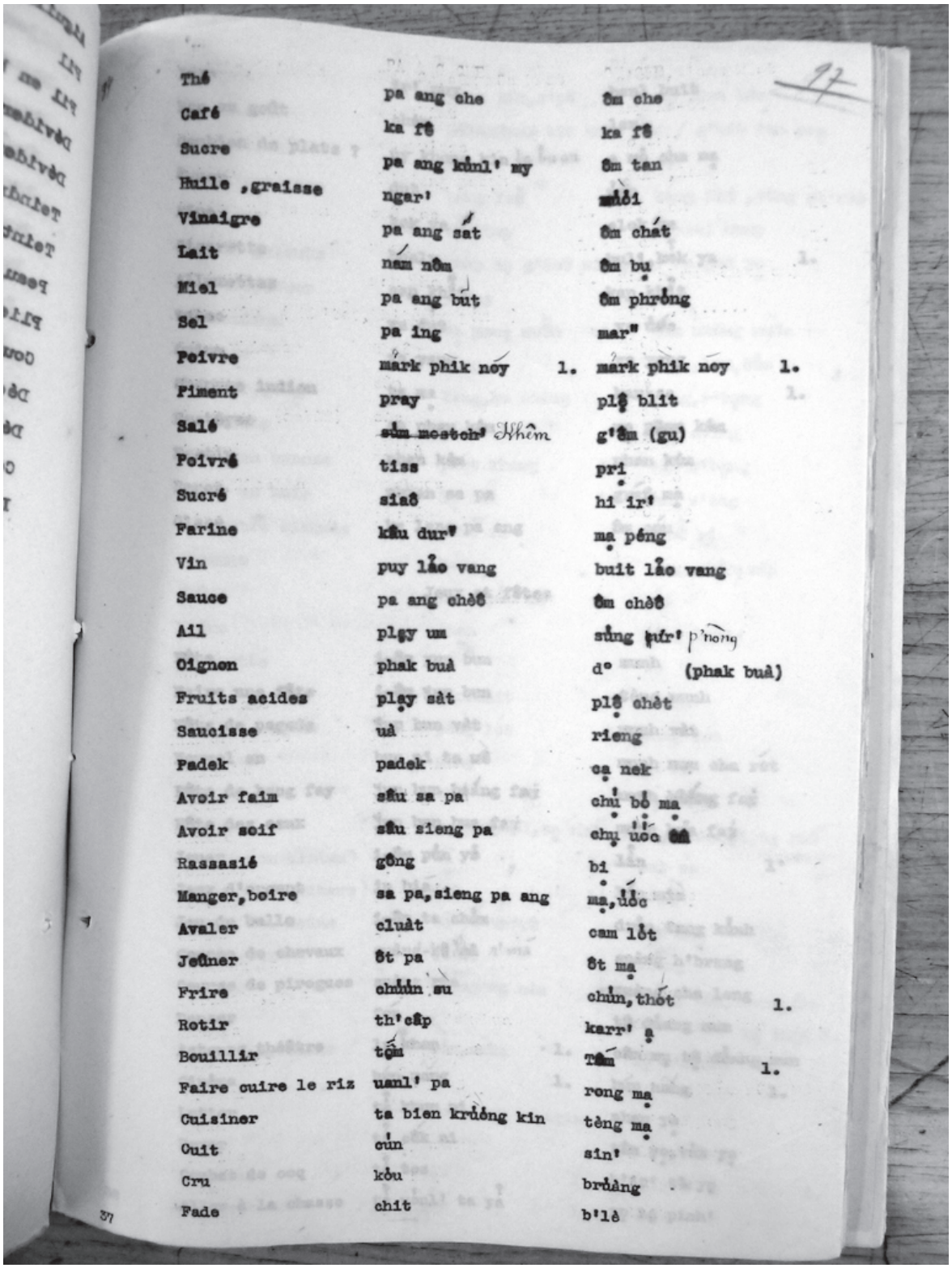
(O)

Obéir	ta yong mai	hủm nheng h'rọ



52

Banc de sable	don cã-etch'		hát sa rệ		
Sabre	ngáo, dap	1.	ngáo, dap		
Sac	sủn dieng		r'ya		
Sacré	phạ, kh'lam	1.	s'rị		
Sage femme	a-oui la vac		cham kủn vày sr'nầm		
			s'ro		
Saison pluvieuse	nham yanr'		nham ka mạ		
Saison fraiche	nham yên		nham ngar'		
Saison sèche	nham dat sa ngay		nham var'		
Salade	nhir' hẳng g'uam (gu)		nham h'rạ tam bri		
Salaire	s'siềng		khả cháng		
Sale	sa rề		yộ		
Salé	khêm		g'êm (gu)		
Salir	i-êm sa rề		tòng yộ		
Salle, hangar	hông, rông		hông, rông		
Saluer	nốp, kham nàp	1.	nốp, kham nàp	1.	
Samedi	van sao		van sao	1.	
Sampôt	noi		phèn van vien		
Sang	mìm		màm		
Sanglier	sing lai		sủông bri		
Sans	tạ-kh' uy		pộ		
Sapotille	play la mut		pầy la mut		
Sarcelle	sôm cáp pa ang		sim pết ôm		
Satisfait	lê chỏ		lộ r'nhiêm		
Sauce	pa ang chèo		ôm ọ, ôm chèp		
Saucisse	riang uả		sải uả		
Saumure	pa ang cạ		ôm cạ g'êm (gu)		
Sauter	sên nhoc		t'ênr'		
Sauterelle	sa ric		hòi		
Sauvages	pram r'rỏlổng		cầm mụ bri		
Savant	nàk pat	1.	cầm mụ nổng khong		
Savoir	diem		nổng		
Savoir faire	i-êm pên		tòng yànr'		
Savon	s'bù	1.	s'bù	1.	
Savoureux	chép				



Thé	pa ang che		ôm che	
Café	ka fê		ka fê	
Sucre	pa ang kùnl' my		ôm tan	
Huile ,graisse	ngar'		mỏi	
Vinaigre	pa ang sat		ôm chát	
Lait	nam nôm		ôm bụ	
Miel	pa ang but		ôm phrông	
Sel	pa ing		mar"	
Poivre	mark phik noy	1.	mark phik noy	1.
Piment	pray		plệ blit	
Salé	sùm meatch' Khêm		g'êm (gu)	
Poivré	tiss		pri	
Sucré	siaô		hi ir'	
Farine	kâu dur"		mạ péng	
Vin	puy lảo vang		buit lảo vang	
Sauce	pa ang chèô		ôm chèô	
Ail	plgy um		sủng tứr' p'nong	
Oignon	phak buà		d° (phak buà)	
Fruits acides	plạy sàt		plệ chèt	
Saucisse	uà		rieng	
Padek	padek		ca nek	
Avoir faim	sâu sa pa		chủ bỏ mạ	
Avoir soif	sâu sieng pa		chụ ước ôm	
Rassasié	gông		bi	
Manger,boire	sa pa,sieng pa ang		mạ,ước	
Avaler	cluàt		cam lốt	
Jeûner	ôt pa		ôt mạ	
Frire	chủn su		chủn, thốt	1.
Rotir	th'cập		karr' ạ	
Bouillir	tốm		Tốm	1.
Faire cuire le riz	uanl' pa		rong mạ	
Cuisiner	ta bien krùông kin		tèng mạ	
Cuit	cún		sin'	
Cru	kỏu		brủàng	
Fade	chit		b'lè	

Appendix II: Comparative Phong Wordlist

Data sources:

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		KATO 2013					NB FIELD (2006-2010)		BUI 1973	Lagreze 1925
		Salui Samnua, HP	Naa Ngiu Hua Muang, HP	Pa Kha Tai Hua Muang, HP	That Hua Muang, HP	Huai Khun Hua Muang, HP				
		PIAT	*TAPUANG*	*PUNG*	*PHAEN*	*LAAN*	*KHAMI*	*LAAN*		
		kniəŋ	kniəŋ	kniəŋ	kniəŋ	kniəŋ	kneeŋ			
1	body hair	ksɔk	ksɔʔ	ksɔʔ	ksɔʔ	ksɔʔ	ksɔʔ	ksɔʔ	ksɔʔ	tơu
2	skin	ktɔh	ktɔɔh	ktɵəh	ktɔh	ktɔɔh	ktɔh	ktɔh	ktɔh	kh'to-kh'
3	bone	siʔiiŋ	siʔiiŋ	siʔiiŋ	siʔiiŋ	siʔiiŋ	sʔiiŋ	sʔiiŋ	sʔiŋ	sʷĩng
4	blood	miim	miim	miim	miim	miim	miim	miim	mim	mĩm
5	tears	ʔaŋ mat	paʔaŋ mat	paʔaŋ mat	paʔaŋ mat	kmaa mat	ʔaŋ mat	khmaa mat		pa ang màt
6	sweat	trʔɔh	srʔot	hɨə	srʔɔt	rɨə	harʔɔh	rɨə		puc
7	head	klii		kluu			klii	(kluu)		cli
7	head	ʔɔɔk	ʔoʔ		ʔɔʔ	ʔɔɔʔ		ʔɔɔʔ	ʔɔʔ	
8	hair	ksɔk klii	ksɔʔ klii	ksɔʔ kluu	ksɔʔ ʔɔʔ	ksɔʔ ʔɔɔʔ	ksɔk klii	ksɔʔ ʔɔɔʔ	ksɔʔ kluu	tơu cli
9	face	ruup	roop	roop	roop	ruup	ruup	ruup		màt
10	eyebrow	kpɨr	tpɨr mat	kpɨr mat	gnɨŋ mat	ŋɨnɨŋ mat	tpur mat	ŋnɨŋ	gnɯŋ	kh'pưnr'
11	eyes	mat	mat	mat	mat	mat	mat	mat	măt	mãt
12	ear	kɤt	kət	kət	kɤt	kɤt	kət	kɔt	kət	kơt
13	nose	mɔh	mɔɔh	moh	moh	moh	mɔh	mɔh	mɔh	mo-kh'
14	mouth	paaŋ	paaŋ	paaŋ	paaŋ	paaŋ	paaŋ	paaŋ	paŋ	pang
15	tongue	taak	taaʔ	taaʔ	taaʔ	ntaaʔ	taak	ʔantaaʔ	taʔ	h'tac
16	teeth	riiŋ	riiŋ	riiŋ	riiŋ	riiŋ	riiŋ	riiŋ	hriŋ	rĩng
17	beard	ksɔk paaŋ	ksɔʔ paaŋ	ksɔʔ paaŋ	ksɔʔ wɛɲ	ksɔʔ wooŋ	nuət	ksɔʔ voŋ		kh'so-k pâng
18	neck	kluul	kruu	kroʔ	rɔŋɔʔ	tkɔɔh	klool	takɔɔ	grɔʔ	
19	shoulder	knaaŋ	waaʔ	waaʔ	waʔ	sowaʔ	knaaŋ	swaʔ	vaʔ	
20	hand	tɨɨi	tɨɨi	tɨɨi	tɨɨi	tɨɨi	təəy	tɨɨy	təj	thé
21	right hand	tɨɨi bɨŋ sam	bɨŋ sam	tɨɨi bɨəŋ khɨɨi	taŋ khɨɨi	bɨŋ sam	bɨəŋ khɨɨy	bɨəŋ sam	tăŋ kʰəj	tang sạm
22	left hand	tɨɨi bɨŋ duok	bɨŋ doʔ	tɨɨi bɨəŋ doʔ	taŋ wii	bɨŋ wii	bɨəŋ dook	bɨəŋ vii	tăŋ vi	tang duâr-kh'
23	arm	waak	tliio	treeo	triio	khanaaŋ	vaak	kʰanaaŋ	triew	
24	elbow	ktaŋ	toŋ tas	ktaŋ	khɛn sɔɔk	kɛn sɔʔ	khɛɛn sɔɔk	khɛɛn sɔʔ	ken sɔʔ	
25	palm	tpɔh tɨɨi	rpaaŋ tɨɨi	trpaaŋ tɨɨi	trpaaŋ tɨɨi	trpaaŋ tɨɨi	tliŋ təəy	tarpaaŋ tɨɨy		
26	finger	rmuəs	rmuus	rmuəs	rmoos	luih moih	niw təəy	niw tɨɨy	rmos təj	ru mu es'
27	fingernail	kɨr	kɨr	kiər	kiər	ŋkiər	kər	ʔaŋgɛr		
28	breast	ʔɔɔɛ	tɔɔh	plɛɛ tuut	tuut	pe ʔuʔ	ʔɔy	pee ʔuʔ	plɛɛ tuut	ụ
29	nipple		cɔɔŋ tɔɔh	coəŋ tuut	cɔɔŋ tuut	tnɔh ʔuʔ	cɔɔm ʔɔy	tnɔh ʔuʔ	cwan	
30	waist	kɔɔɛ	ʔɛɛo	ʔɛɛo	ʔɛɛo	ndəp	ʔɛɛw	ʔandap	ʔɛw	
31	belly	pul	pul	pɨl	pɨl	pɨl	pul	pɨl	pɯl	pùnl'
32	navel	srpuu	srpuu	srpuu	srpuu	srpuu	srpuu	tpuu	srpu	
33	buttocks	luur	luu	plɛɛ luu	plɛɛ luu	duh	roor	duh	plɛɛ lu	

34	feces	ʔiək	ʔiəʔ	ʔiəʔ	ʔiəʔ	ʔɛʔ	ʔiək	ʔɛʔ	ʔiəʔ	irk
35	to defecate									
36	urine	nom	prdɨ̈m	prʔəəm	prʔɨ̈m	brɨ̈m	nom	brɨ̈m	prʔəm	prơ ơm
37	to urinate									
38	to fart	pom	pom	pom	pom	pom	pom	pom		
39	to give birth	kɨ̈t kuən	kɨ̈t kuun	kɨ̈t koon	kɨ̈t koon	kɨ̈t koon	kəət kuan	kɨ̈t	kəət	kơt
40	leg	plɨ̈o	pləəo	ɟuŋ	ɟuŋ	talaaŋ	pleew	tlaaŋ	yuŋ	plơu
41	foot	ksaŋ	rpaaŋ ɟiŋ	ɟuŋ	ɟuŋ	ɟuŋ	kasaŋ	ɟuŋ	rpaŋ yuŋ	hưn yes
42	back	knduui	kndooi	kndooi	kndoŋ	grooŋ	kanduuy	grooŋ		kun dôi
43	to see	mɔh	moh	muh	muh	muh	moh	muh	muh	mô-kh
43	to look	bɨ̈ŋ	kat	bəəŋ		toon	bəəŋ	toon	bəŋ	càt
44	to hear	diəm	buət	buət	boot	diəm	diəm	dɛm		t'yong
44	to listen	taŋal	faŋ	faŋ		smoor	taŋal	smoor	făŋ	
45	to eat	saa	saa	saa	saa	saa	saa	saa	sa	sa
46	to drink	siəŋ	siəŋ	sɨ̈n	sɨ̈n	sɨ̈n	siəŋ	sɨ̈n	sən	sieng
47	to bite	jah	jah	ras	jah	kiət	toyh	kiat	găt	ya'kh'
48	to hold in hand	raŋ	been, raŋ	cap	ɟup	sap	been	sap		
49	to put, to place	dɨ̈i	waaŋ	waaŋ	waaŋ	plaʔ	dee	plaʔ, doʔ	doʔ	
50	to push	ɲuu	knɲul	ɲuu	ɲuu	ɲuu	ɲuu	ɲuu		nhú ờng
51	to pull	kndɛɲ	kndom	kthɔʔ	kthoʔ	kthɔk	roc	ktɔk	kthɔh	kưn dễnh
52	to throw	dɔh	doh	dəəs	sŋdɨ̈m	ndɨ̈m	dɔh	ʔandɨ̈m	dəs	dô-kh'
53	to pick up	ʔaat	ʔaat	ʔaat	roos	ɟup	ʔaat	ɟup		
54	to ladle	bat ʔaŋ	bat paʔaŋ		bat paʔaŋ	bat kmaa	bat	bat	păt păʔăŋ	
54	to ladle		taʔ paʔaŋ	tak paʔaŋ			tak ʔaŋ			
55	to run	pas	pas	pas	pas	soŋ goəc	payh	ʔaŋgoc	pas	
56	to sit	ɟɨ̈k	ɟɨ̈ʔ	ɟɨ̈ʔ	ɟɨʔ	ɟɨ̈ʔ	yəək	ɟiaʔ	yəʔ	yơc
57	to stand up	ɲɔŋ	liiʔ ɲɔɔŋ	ɲoəŋ	liʔ	sar	ɲɔŋ	sar	ɲɔŋ	lưc
58	to cough	tuur	toor	tgɔʔ	tgɔʔ	dgɔʔ	toor	dgɔʔ	tgɔʔ	tuar'
59	1	baʔ ʔan	ba ʔan	nɨŋ	nɨŋ		baʔ ʔan	baʔ ʔan	bo	môy
60	2	baar	sɔɔŋ	sɔɔŋ	sɔɔŋ	baar	baar	baar	bar	bar'
61	3	piə	saam	saam	saam		saam	paj	băj	sãm
62	4	pon	sii	sii	sii		sii	sii	pon	pon
63	5	baʔ biəŋ tɨ̈i	haa	haa	haa		haa	haa		hả
64	6	bopʔuə	hok	hok	hok		hok	hok		hôc
65	7	bəɟiət	cet	cet	cet		cet	cet		chêt
66	8	bətet	pɛɛt	pɛɛt	pɛɛt		pɛɛt	pɛɛt		pet
67	9	boprom	kao	kao	kao		kaw	kaw		káo
68	10	baar bɨəŋ tɨ̈i	sip	sip	sip		sip	sip		sip
69	11		sip ʔet	sip ʔet	sip ʔet		sip ʔet	sip ʔet		
70	12		sip sɔɔŋ	sip sɔɔŋ	sip sɔɔŋ		sip sɔɔŋ	sip sɔɔŋ		
71	sky	rtuoŋ	tooŋ	toŋ	toŋ	toŋ	hartooŋ	toŋ	toŋ	tuang

72	sun	pasŋee	sŋai	sŋai	sŋai	sŋai	pasiə	sŋay	sŋăj	sa ngay
73	moon	pakikoŋ	kii	kii	kii	kii	pakii	kii	ki	ba ky
74	star	pakluc	kluc	kluc	smɛɲ	smɛɲ	kluc	smeɲ	smeɲ	cl'uitch'
75	wind	wɨ̈r	wɨ̈r	wɨ̈r	wɨ̈r	ʔəmpoŋ	vəər	ʔampoŋ	vər	vơr'
76	rain	ɟar	ɟar		ɟar	ɟar	ɟar	ɟar		yanr'
77	it rains	ɟar kmii	ɟar kmii	ɟar kmii	ɟar kmii	klɔh ɟar	ɟar khamee	ɟar	yar kmi	clo'kh' cami
78	lightning strikes	phii pdaa sah	phii bdaa sah	phii prdaa sah	thee wa daa sah	phii bdaa sah	hartooŋ sah	phiivadaa psah		pip p'da sâ-kh'
79	it thunders	trɔɔŋ kɨ̈r	trɔɔŋ kɨ̈r	trɔɔŋ kɨ̈r	trɔɔŋ kmii	trɔɔŋ kmii	thrɔɔŋ kɨr	trɔɔŋ kʰmii	trɔŋ kmi	trôngkơr'
80	soil, earth	ptiə	tpɨ̈	tpai	ptai	ptai	patiə	ptay	ptej	th'pê
81	stone	kliiŋ	kliiŋ	kliiŋ	kliiŋ	kliiŋ	kliiŋ	kliiŋ	kon kliŋ	cling
82	hill, mountain	knɨ̈ŋ	guuŋ	rkoon	guuŋ	psəh	khanəəŋ	psəh	guŋ	g'ung
83	water	ʔaŋ	paʔaŋ	paʔaŋ	paʔaŋ mat	kmaa	ʔaŋ	kʰmaa	păʔăŋ	pa ang
84	lake	tmboŋ	slɔɔŋ	paʔaŋ ruu	tmboŋ	muur kmaa	slɔŋ	moor kʰmaa		tôm bông
85	river	rɔɔŋ	rɔɔŋ paʔaŋ	rɔɔŋ paʔaŋ	paʔaŋ ruu	kpɔh meek	looc ʔaŋ	kʰmaa	yəw păʔăŋ	pa ang
86	fire	ʔɔs	ʔos	ʔɔs	ʔɔs	ʔoəih	ʔoyh	ʔoyh	ʔos	ôst
87	smoke	tɨ̈wɨ̈l	ptuəʔ ʔos	ptuʔ ʔɔs	ptuʔ ʔɔs	ptoʔ ʔoeih	ptuak	ptaw ʔoyh		ph'tuâr'
88	house	ɟɨ̈ŋ	ɟiiŋ	ɟiiŋ	ɟiiŋ	ɟiiŋ	ɟɨ̈ŋ	ɟiiŋ	yiŋ	yưng
89	roof	kndɔh ɟɨ̈ŋ	kooŋ ɟiiŋ	kooŋ	kooŋ	kooŋ ɟiiŋ	pɛɛ ɟɨ̈ŋ	kooŋ ɟiiŋ	kăn dɔŋ yiŋ	kưn dô-kh' yưng
90	pillar	sraŋ	sraŋ	sraŋ	sraŋ	sraŋ	sanraŋ	sraŋ	kɛn	s'rang
91	mat	laat	laat	saat	saat	saat	saat	saat		
92	comforter	situk	ktuʔ	stuʔ	kɟɨ̈ʔ	stuk	satuk	stuk	kyəʔ	s'rư nưm
93	pillow	tŋgiil	tŋgeel	tŋgool	kon kluu	gool kluu	taŋgeel	gol gluu	kon klu	tưng g'ienr'
94	mosquito net	sut	sut	muŋ	muŋ	muŋ	sut	sut		
95	knife	raa	raa	krɨ̈i	miit	miit	raa	krɨ̈yh	ʔara	crê
96	to cut	sikam	kap	kap	kap	kap	gat	kap	tăp	kap
97	tail	ktaa	raam	ktaa	ktaa	ktaa	ktaa	ktaa		rang
98	horn	ktuoŋ	ktooŋ	ktoŋ	ktoŋ	ktoŋ	ktooŋ	ktoŋ	ktɔŋ	tuang
99	tiger	rwaai	rwaai	rwaai	rwaai	rwaai	harvaay	ruay	rvaj	r'vay rông
100	elephant	tijaaŋ	dɟaaŋ	tɟaaŋ	saɟaaŋ	saɟaaŋ	toyaaŋ	syaaŋ	syaŋ	t'yáng
101	mouse	kniə	knɨ̈	khanai	knai	khanai	khaniə	kʰnay	knɛj	ca nê, k'nê
102	bird	som	som	som	som	som	som	som	som	sôm
103	to fly	par	baŋ	mbaŋ	par	mpar	par	ʔampar	par	hưm bang
104	egg	plee	plai	plɛɛ	plɛɛ	plee	plɛɛ	plee	plɛ	plạy
105	crow	ʔaak	ʔaaʔ	ʔaaʔ	ʔaʔ	klʔaaʔ	ʔaak	galʔaaʔ	ʔaʔ	
106	buffalo	slɨ̈o	sləəo	sləəo	traʔ	traaʔ	thriik	traaʔ	trăʔ	s'lơu
107	cattle	sŋgoo	sŋgɔɔ	sŋgɔɔ	ɟləəo	ɟileeo	sleew	ɟliiw	yləw	sưng go
108	pig	siɲ	siɲ	siɲ	siɲ	siɲ	siɲ	siɲ	siŋ	sìng
109	horse	rmaa	rmaa	rmaa	rmaa	rmaa	harmaa	ʔarmaa	rma	r'má
110	dog	suə	soo	sɔɔ	sɔɔ	sɔɔ	suə	sɔɔ	sɔ	cho
111	cat	ŋeo	mɛɛo	meəo	mɛɛo	meəo	ŋɛɛw	mɛɛw	mɛw	ngao
112	chicken	ʔiər	ʔiər	ʔiər	ʔiər	ʔiər	ʔiər	ʔɛr	ʔir	h'ir'

113	duck	kaap	kaap	kaap	kaap	ʔaap	kaap	ʔaap	kap	câp
114	bee	buut	buut	buut	buut	buut	buut	buut	yə̆w but	yâu bùt
115	fly	muəs	muəs	muəs	moos	muuih	mɨəyh	muayh	mos	mu-ês'
116	mosquito	ŋɔɔŋ	ŋɔɔŋ	ŋoəŋ	ŋɔɔŋ	ʔiʔ ŋɔɔŋ	ŋɔɔŋ	ʔii ŋɔɔŋ	ŋɔŋ	ngong
117	ant	moc	moc	moc	mɛc	mɛc	mec	məc	mec	mô-êt
118	snake	mar	mar	mar	mar	mar	mar	mar	mar	manr'
119	fish	kaa	kaa	kaa	kaa	kaa	kaa	kaa	ka	cạ
120	shrimp	kuŋ	kuŋ	kuŋ	kuŋ	kuŋ	kuŋ	kuŋ	pa kuŋ	cung
121	crab	baraap	raap	raap	raap	raap	raap	raap	hrap	rãp
122	frog	kop	gdaʔ	krɔɔ	kdaʔ	gdaʔ	kadak	gdaʔ	kdaʔ	kr'lo
123	to fish with rod	ɟɔŋ tbas	ɟɔŋ dbas	ɟoəŋ tbas	tɨk bet	thɨk bet	sit bet	tɨk bet		yong ta bas'
124	to kill	kmbɨ̈l	kmbɨ̈l	kmbəəl	kmbəəl	gmbɨ̈l	kmbəəl	ʔambɨ̈l	kbəl	cam bơnl'
125	seed	kluəŋ	kluəŋ	klooŋ	klooŋ	klooŋ	kluəŋ	klooŋ	kloŋ	cluang
126	tree	lam sʔoŋ	kok suʔuŋ	lam sʔuŋ	lam sʔuŋ	lam sʔuŋ	lam saʔuŋ	lam sʔuŋ	lăm sʔuŋ	ying s'ung
127	leaf	tɨ̈o sʔoŋ	təəo suʔuŋ	təəo sʔuŋ	təəo sʔuŋ	tiiu sʔuŋ	teew saʔuŋ	tiiw sʔuŋ	təw	tơu s'ung
128	flower	plaaŋ sʔoŋ	plaaŋ suʔuŋ	plaaŋ sʔuŋ	plaaŋ sooi	plaaŋ sʔuŋ	plaaŋ sooy	plaaŋ	plaŋ	plang suay
129	bean	taai	plai ʔam	plɛɛ ʔam	plɛɛ ʔam	plee doəih	plɛɛ ʔam	plee doayh	plɛ ʔăm	plạy am
130	bamboo	mai phai	rmɨ̈	poʔoo	mai phai	mai phai	may phay	may phay		máy phài
131	paddy plant	lam paa	kok paa	ɟuŋ paa	kok paa	lam paa	lam paa	lam paa		
132	rice	paa	paa	paa	paa	paa	paa	paa	pa	pa
133	sesame	lŋaa	lŋaa	lŋaa	lŋaa	lŋaa	plɛɛ lŋaa	ʔalŋaa	lŋa	plạy nga
134	ginger	kiɲ	kiɲ	kiɲ	kuŋ	kuŋ	kiɲ	kuŋ	kuŋ	
135	banana	praat	praat	praat	praat	praat	phraat	praat	prak	pràt
136	sugar cane	klmii	klmii	klmii	glmii	sɔʔɔɔm	kharmii	sʔɔɔm	kə̆lmi	kưn my
138	to plant	tɨ̈l	tɨ̈l	tɨ̈l	tɨ̈l	tɨ̈l	təəl	tɨ̈l	təl	tơnl
139	plow	thai	sɨ̈h naa	thai	thai	thai	thai	thay	tʰaj	thãi kh'ting
140	irrigated field	ktiiŋ	naa	naa	naa	naa	na	naa	na	kh'ting
141	upland filed	lɛɲ	lɛɲ	leeŋ	leeŋ	leeŋ	leɲ	leeŋ	leɲ	lêng
142	oil	ŋaar	tkaal	ŋaar	skaal	skaal	ŋaar	skaal	skaal	ngar'
143	salt	ʔiɲ	piʔiɲ	piʔiɲ	pʔiɲ	peʔeɲ	ʔiɲ	ʔiɲ	pɛ ʔiɲ	pa ing
144	sugar	ʔaŋ klmii	paʔaŋ kmii	nam ʔɔɔi	nam ʔɔɔi	nam ʔɔɔi	namtaan	nam ʔɔɔy	năm tam	pa ang kưnl' my
145	chilli	pree	prai	prai	prai	prai	panree	pray	praj	plạy pray
146	tea	saa		saa	saa	saa	saa	saa		
146	tea	cɛɛ		cɛɛ	cɛɛ				cɛ	pa ang che
146	tea	miəŋ	miəŋ	miəŋ	miəŋ					
147	wine	puui	pɨ̈i	pii	pii	braai	pooy	braay	pi	puy
148	cigarette	ɟaa duut	ɟaa duut	ɟaa duut	ɟaa duut	ɟaa duut	ɟaa duut	ɟaa duut		ya dut
149	to cook rice	ʔuul paa	ʔool paa	ʔool paa	gʔɔh paa	gɔʔɔh paa	ʔool pah	ʔɔh	gʔɔh pa	
150	firewood	pan ʔɔs	pan ʔos	pən ʔɔs	pən ʔɔs	pnʔoəih	ʔoyh	pnʔuəyh	păn ʔos	pan ôst
151	pot	təluok	tlooʔ	tlɔʔ	tloʔ	tlɔk	tlook	tɔlɔk	tloh	
152	to boil	tom	tom	tom	tom	tom	tom	tom	tɔm	tốm kưn

153	to roast	tkaap	tkaap	tkaap	piiŋ	piiŋ	tkaap	piiŋ	tkap	th'kap
154	cloth	phɛɛn phɛɛ	phɛɛn	phɛɛn	phɛɛn	pheən	phɛɛn	phɛɛn	pʰɛn	pèn
155	to sew	swiis	swees	swiəs	sweeh	srɨŋ	soyh	srɨŋ	svɛh	s'viêss
156	needle	srmuui	smmos	srmos	srmos	srmɛh	sarmooy	sarmɛh	srmos	sôm most
157	thread	pan swiis	prsaʔ swees	psaʔ sŋwiəs	prsaʔ	saʔ srɨŋ	pharsak	psaʔ srɨŋ	psăʔ	pr'sac
158	to wash clothes	pɔh	poh	puh	puh	sak	poh	puh	puh	
159	clothes	krɨəŋ tɔk sat	baʔ sat	baʔ sat	baʔ sat	baʔ sat	khrɨəŋ	khrɨəŋ baʔ sat	baʔ	krừơng nùng
160	to wear	baʔ	baʔ	baʔ	baʔ	baʔ	tɔk	baʔ		[sum]
160	to wear		sat	sat	sat	sat	sat	sat		sàt
161	to undress	wit	wit	wit	wit	bən	vic	bən	vit	vitch
161	to undress		tɨs	təs	təs	tɛh	toyh	tɛh		
162	road	kruŋ	kruuŋ	kruŋ	kruuŋ	kruŋ	khruŋ	kruŋ	kruŋ	crung
163	village	duəŋ	duəŋ	blooŋ	blooŋ	blooŋ	duəŋ	blooŋ		duang
164	to buy	leək	lɛɛʔ	lɛɛʔ	lɛʔ	lɛʔ	lɛʔ	lɛʔ	lɛʔ	lék
165	to sell	suok	sooʔ	sooʔ	soʔ	paaɲ	sook	paaɲ	sɔʔ	suárk
166	market	talaat	talaat	talaat	talaat	talaat	tlaat	talaat	talat	lát
167	money	ŋɨɨn	ŋɨɨn	ŋəən	ŋɨɨn	ŋən	ŋɨɨn	ŋəən	ŋən	ngơn
167	to speak	maai	kee	maai	maai	maai	maay	maay	tmaj	cay
168	to speak			wao			vɔɔ			
169	to ask	tɨɨn	saŋ	saŋ	saŋ	saŋ	təən	saŋ		tơnl'
170	to answer	tɔɔp	tɔɔp	tɔɔp	tɔɔp	tɔɔp	tɔɔp	tɔɔp		top
171	to call	plduoŋ	giiʔ	giiʔ	truu	truu	plooŋ	truu	tru	g'i-ic
172	language	maai	maai	maai	maai	maai	maay	panmaay		pha sã
173	to write	khiən	khiən	khiən	khiən	khiən	khiən	khiən	kʰiən	khĩen
174	paper	ciə	ciə	ciə	ciə	ciə	ciə	ciə	ciə	chiá
175	to stick	patet	ptit	tit	tit	tit	tit	tit		tit
176	to play	kwaa	ʔeeo	kan ɟɨr	kwaa	rɨɨi	ɲaay	rɨɨy	rəj	ta buam
177	song	khap	khaap	khap	khap	khap	khap	khap	kʰăp	
178	to get tired	ʔit	soʔ	sɔʔ	soʔ	ʔit	mɨay	ʔit	ʔit	th'kièn
179	to rest	phak phɔɔn	phak	phak	sao ʔit	laao ʔit	saw məəy	phak		yưc ta kieu
180	to sleep	jɨɨp	jɨɨp	taʔ	taʔ	taaʔ	yeep	taʔ	taʔ	yơp
181	to die	bɨɨl	bɨɨl	bəəl	bəəl	bɨɨl	bəəl	bɨɨl	bəl	bơnl
182	age	ʔaɲuʔ	ʔaɲuu	ʔaɲuʔ	ʔaɲuʔ	ʔaɲuʔ	ʔaɲuʔ	ʔaɲuʔ		a nhụ
183	to be ill	pɨh	lɔh pɨɨh	lɔh pɔh	poh	sɔʔ riu	pɨh	pɔh	pɔh	pơh
184	painful	soo	sao	sao	sao	sao	sɔɔ	saw	săw	sâu
185	to hiccough	saʔək	lɔɔʔ	ʔəl lɔɔ	sʔɨk	səŋgək	lɔk	saŋgɔk		s'ợ
186	to burp	kndɨr	gdɨr	kdɨr	ʔɨəm	knʔɨək	kandɨr	kanʔɨəʔ		
187	louse	see	sai	sai	sai	sai	see	say	săj	sảy
188	medicine	rɔk mai	jaa	ɟaa	ɟaa	ɟaa	yaa rok may	hak may		khong ya
189	bow	snaa	snaa	snaa	snaa	snaa	snaa	snaa	snah	s'nà
190	arrow	kam	kam	kam	kam	kam	kam	kam	kăm	câm

191	name	pnii	pnii	pnnuu	prnuu	rnuu	pnii	parnuu		pưn ni
192	father	juoŋ	jooŋ	jooŋ	jəŋ	ɟɔɔŋ	yooŋ	ɟɔɔŋ	yəŋ	yang
193	mother	nuu	ʔuuʔ	ʔuuʔ	ʔuʔ	ɟiɔ	yɔɔ	ɟiəw	ʔuʔ	ba yâu
194	husband	mɔh juoŋ	haʔ jooŋ	juŋ	juŋ	ʔah ɟoŋ	kuən yooŋ	ʔah yuŋ	ʔah yuŋ	a hi yuang
195	wife	kuui	haʔ kuui	kii	kii	ʔah kii	kuən kuuy	ʔah kii	ʔaki	aquy
196	son	kuən knɔh juoŋ	kuun knoh jooŋ	koon juŋ	kon juŋ	koon ʔah ɟoŋ	kuan kun yooŋ	koon ʔah yuŋ		kuan sa ky
197	daughter	kuən knɔh kuui	kuun knoh kuui	koon kii	kon kii	koon ʔah kii	kuən kun kuuy	koon ʔah kii		kuan ka mơn
198	child	kuən	kuun	koon	koon	koon lɨk	kuən	koon lɨk	kon	kuan
199	male/man	knɔh juoŋ	knoh jooŋ	koon juŋ	kon juŋ	koon ʔah ɟoŋ	kuən yooŋ	kon ʔah yuŋ	kon ʔah yəŋ	cô-ônh
200	female/woman	knɔh kuui	knoh kuui	koon kii	kon kii	koon ʔah kii	kuən kuuy	kon ʔah kii	kon ʔah ki	a-cuy
201	man / human	pram	pram	pram	pram	pram	phram	pram	prăm	pram
202	people	thai	pram	thai	thai	thai	thai	thai		
203	to meet with	cuəp	moh	cuəp	cuəp	cuəp	cuəp	cuəp		tứng g'ơm
204	to wait for	kom	kom	kuum	kuum	kuum	kom	kuum	kum	kôm
205	to give to	maa	maa	maa	maa	maa	maa	maa		ma
206	to use	səh	raŋ	səəh	səə	sɨh	sɨh	parsuu		
207	to look for	sɔʔ bɨɨŋ	sɔɔʔ	sɔɔʔ	sɔɔʔ	sɔʔ	sɔɔk	sɔʔ	sɔʔ	
208	to laugh	kriis	kriis	kriis	kriih	krih	khrih	krih	krih	cli
209	to love	hak	pheeŋ	hak	phɛɛŋ	pheəŋ	phɛɛŋ	phɛɛŋ	$p^hɛn$	kan ào
210	to fear	tuŋ	tuuŋ	tuŋ	tuuŋ	tuŋ	tuŋ	tuŋ	tuŋ	tứng
211	to be frightened	ktan	ktan	ktan	kndiiŋ	təlal	ktan	tlɔl		
212	to know	diəm	diəm	diəm	diəm	diəm	diəm	dɛm	diəm	diem
213	to remember	cɨɨ	cɨɨ	cɨɨ	cɨɨ	cɨɨ	cɨɨ	cɨɨ		chử
214	to forget	jɛt	ɲɨt	jɛt	kelweel	kelweel	yokvaal	kelveel	kel vel	yơt
215	cold	ɟen	ɟin	ɟen	ɟen	ɟen	yen	yen	yen	yên
216	hot	taat	taat	ʔao	taat	puuʔ	taat	puuʔ	tat	
217	hot		srʔot							
217	hungry	soo paa	sao saa paa	sao paa	sao paa		sɔɔ paa			
					jooc paa	ɟooc paa		ɲɟuəc	yuəc	
218	thirsty	soo ʔaŋ	sao siəŋ paʔaŋ	sao paʔaŋ	sao sɨɨn paʔaŋ	caat sɨɨn kmaa	sɔɔ ʔaŋ	caat sɨɨn khmaa		sâu pa ang
219	drunk	ʔiir	ʔeer	ʔoor	ʔoor	ʔoor	ʔɛɛr	ʔɔɔr	ʔɔr pi	ʔir'
220	delicious	ceəp	cɛɛp	ceəp	cɛɛp	ɟeəp	ɟɛɛp	ɟɛɛp	cɛp	
221	sweet	siɔ	siəo	siəo	sio	siəo	siəw	siəw	siəw	siaô
222	sour	sat	sat	sat	sat	sat	sat	sat	săt	sát
223	pepper-hot	ʔiim	prai	tiis	prai	prai	tih	pray	prɛj	pray
224	salty	khem	khem	khem	khem	khem	khem ʔiɲ	k^hem	$k^hɛm$	khêm
225	thing	krɨəŋ	krɨəŋ	krɨəŋ	krɨəŋ	krɨəŋ	khrɨəŋ	khrɨəŋ		krương
226	big	tuui	roŋ	ruu	ruu	meek	ruu	meek	ru	rông
227	small	kɔɔn	dɛɛt	leəp	lɛɛp	ʔeet	lɛɛp	ʔeet	lɛp	dêt
228	tall, high	suuŋ	ɟɔɔh	suuŋ	suuŋ	suuŋ	suuŋ	suuŋ	duə	sũng
229	low	tam	tam	tam	tam	tam	tam	tam	tăm	tàm

230	long	liaŋ	leeŋ	looŋ	looŋ	looŋ	leeŋ	looŋ	loŋ	lieng
231	short	kɛc	kɛc	kɛɛʔ	kiəʔ	kɛʔ	kec	kɛʔ	kɛʔ	kêtch
232	broad, wide	kwaaŋ	kwaaŋ	kwaaŋ	kwaaŋ	kwaaŋ	kwaaŋ	kwaaŋ	kwaŋ	kuáng
233	narrow	khɛɛp	khɛɛp	kheəp	khɛɛp	kheəp	khɛɛp	khɛɛp	$k^hɛp$	
234	thick	ban	tmɨɨl	ban	tmɨɨl	ktɔn	ban	ktən	tməl	
235	thin	kdaa	gdaa	kdaa	kdaa	ŋənaa	kadaa	ŋnaa	kda	k'da
236	deep	lək	ləʔ	ləʔ	lək	lɤk	lək	lɔk	ləʔ	lừc
237	shallow	tɨɨn	gdal	tɨɨn	tɨɨn	tɨɨn	tɨɨn	tɨn	tɯn	tứn
238	round	ʔɔm lum	dbɨr	tbɨr	tbɨr	dbɨr	ʔɔm-lɔɔm	dbɨr	tbɯr	t'bơnr'
239	color	sii	sii	sii	sii	sii	sii	sii		
240	red	ksor	ksor	ksor	ksor	ksor	ksor	ksor	ksɔr	kh'sơr'
241	yellow	ksaai	ksaai	ksaai	ksaai	ksaai	ksaay	ksaay	ksaj	kh' say
242	blue	ksɨɨŋ	sii ʔit	ksɨɨŋ	ksɨɨŋ	lee	ksəəŋ	sii faa	ksəŋ	sĩ khĩao
243	white	luk	luuʔ	luuʔ	luuʔ	luuʔ	luk	luuʔ	luʔ	luc
244	black	jam	jam	jam	jam	ŋɛŋ	yam	ŋeŋ	yăm	yam
245	green	ksɨɨŋ	ksɨɨŋ	ksɨɨŋ	ksɨɨŋ	kciəo	ksəəŋ	kciəw	ksəŋ	k'sơng
246	sound, noise	siəŋ	siəŋ	siəŋ	siəŋ	siəŋ	siəŋ	siəŋ		sĩeng
247	light weight	kɟiil	gɟal	kɟool	kɟool	gɟool	kayəəl	gɟool	kyɔl	k'yiènl'
248	heavy	kɟɨh	gɟɨɨh	kɟuh	kɟuh	gɟuh	kayɨh	gɟoh	kyuh	k'yơ-kh'
249	dry	pah	pah	pah	pah	pah	pah	pah	pah	
250	wet	bɔk	bɔɔʔ	sum	bɔʔ	bɔʔ	bɔk	bɔʔ	bɔh	bo-k'
251	soft	kɟɨɨm	piəʔ	kɟəəm	piəʔ	piəʔ	kayəəm	piəʔ	kmaʔ	
251	soft		ʔuuc							
252	hard	kraŋ	kɛɛn	kraŋ	kɛɛn	keən	khraŋ	kɛn	kɛn	crang
253	full	kbiə	gbəi	kbai	kbai	gbai	kabiə	gbay	gɔŋ	ka bê
254	new	tmiə	tmmɨi	tmməi	trmai	trmai	thmiə	tarmay	trməj	tưm mê
255	old	prom	prom	prom	prom	prom	phrom	prom	prom	prơm
255	old			sɨr						
256	raw	ris	ris	kəəo	rɨs	rih	rih	rih	rɯs	
257	done, ripe	kɨn	kɨn	kɨn	kɨn	kɨn	kɨn	kɨn	kɯn	
258	good	lɨɨi	ɟat	ɟat	ɟat	ɟat	ləəy	ɟat	yac	lê, lô
259	bad	sree	sree	sree	suə	sua	sua	sray	sre	
260	difficult	lmbaak	lmbaaʔ	ɲaaʔ	lmbaʔ	ɲaaʔ	yaak	ɲaaʔ	lăm baʔ	bark
261	easy	ŋaai	ŋaai	ŋaai	ŋaai	ŋaai	ŋaay	ŋaay	ŋaj	ngày
262	expensive	kɟih	phɛɛŋ	phɛɛŋ	phɛɛŋ	pheəŋ	phɛɛŋ	phɛɛŋ	$p^hɛŋ$	
263	cheap	kɟiil	thɨɨʔ	thɨɨk	thɨɨk	thɨɨk	thɨɨk	thɨk	yoh	
264	clean	saʔaat	saʔaat	saʔaat	saʔaat	ŋaam	ŋaam saʔaat	saʔaat	săʔăt	
265	dirty	pɨən	kabuuʔ	pɨən	pɨən	smbuur	pɨən	smbuur	să lum	sa rê
266	quick, fast	wai	wai	wai	wai	wai	vai	vay	vɛj	vai
267	slow	ʔɨŋ	ʔɨŋ	ʔəŋ	ʔɨŋ	ʔɨŋ	ʔɨŋ	ʔɨŋ	ɲɯʔ	p'oi p'ưng
268	fat	tuui	miəs	miəs	miəs	bloŋ	tuy	bloŋ	miəs	mi-es'

269	thin	guor	goor	goor	goor	goor	kadɔɔy	goor	yɔj gɔr	g'uar'
270	old aged	riəh	riəh	riəh	briəh	thao	riəh	brɛɛh	briəh	a'kh' riar-kh
271	young	nɨm	num	num	num	num	num	num	num	nùm
272	year	pii	pii	pii	pii	pii	pii	pii	lvan	pi
273	this year	lwaaŋ ʔee	mai lawaaŋ	lwaaŋ nai	lwaaŋ hai	waaŋ niəh	vaaŋ ʔɛɛ	pii nɛɛh		
274	last year	ŋɔl waaŋ	naa lawaaŋ	tɛɛ mɨl waaŋ	nɛɛl waaŋ	nɛɛl waaŋ	ŋalvaaŋ	pii phaan maa		
275	next year	ʔɔl waaŋ	ʔuul lawaaŋ	ʔool waaŋ	ʔool waaŋ	ʔol waaŋ	ʔuər vaaŋ	pii ʔalvaaŋ may		
276	month	dɨən	dɨən	dɨən	dɨən	dɨən	dɨən	dɨən	dɯən	dươn
277	this month	dɨən mee	dɨən beʔee	dɨən nai	dɨən hai	dɨən nɛɛ	dɨən mɛɛ	dɨən nɛɛ		
278	last month	dɨən kiil	dɨən kiil	dɨən kiil	dɨən kiil	dɨən ʔɔk klaai	dɨən mom dih	dɨən skil		
279	next month	dɨən tmiə	dɨən tmmɨi	dɨən tlɔh	dɨən naa	dɨən tɨl ʔɛɛ	dɨən thamiə	dɨən məə		
280	today	mai tɨɨ	mai dɨɨ	ʔii ʔoon	ʔii ʔoon	ʔaʔoon	mɛɛ təə	ʔaʔoon	ʔiʔon	may to
281	yesterday	tisiŋee	naan ʔee	tɛɛ tʔai	tai tʔai	tɛɛ tniəh	tasiə	tɛɛ tnɛɛh	ʔi tʔɛj	ta-ê
282	tomorrow	rooŋ ʔuəs	tɨʔ ʔuəs	tʔai	paa tʔai	pniəh	rŋʔuəyh	pniəh	păʔ tʔɛj	p'ta-ê
283	morning	tɔɔn ʔuəs	khaʔ ʔuəs	saŋ ʔoos	ptuʔ ʔoos	nɛl ʔuəih	ʔuəyh	nɛɛl ʔuəyh	tɛʔ ʔɔs	sang u-es'
284	noon	ʔasiŋee	tii sŋai	saŋ sŋai	nɛɛl sŋai	nɛl sŋai	pasiə taɲɔŋ	nɛɛl sŋay	ɲam pa ʔɔs	nham tra day
285	evening	karsoɲ	kraŋ kasəɲ	saŋ krboo	ʔoor boo	nɛl bao	soɲ	nɛɛl baw	ɲam bo	kar-suẽnh
286	night	ʔaasoɲ	tii səɲ	saŋ boo	nɛɛl boo	nɛl sabao	ŋan soɲ	nɛɛl sbaw	nɛl bo	sang sô-ênh
287	above	taŋ tul	too tooi	taŋ tɨl	taŋ tɨl	kntɨl	taŋtuul	kantɨl	tăŋ tɯl	tang tũnl'
288	below	taŋ sul	sɨɨ sɨɨo	taŋ sɨl	taŋ sɨl	knsɨl	taŋsɨɨl	kansɨl	taŋ sɯl	tang sũnl'
289	far	liəŋ	leeŋ	geeŋ	geeŋ	klaai	leeŋ	geeŋ	geeŋ	lieng
290	near	kdiəh	gdiəh	kdiəh	kdiəh	gdiəh	kadiəh	gdɛh	kdiəh	k'dir-kh'
291	to come	wɨɨt	wɨɨt	wəət	wɨɨt	wɨt	vəət	vət	lɔh	plong
292	to go	ɲaan	mɨr	mɨr	mɨr	mɨr	ɲaan	mɨr	mɯr	mưnr'
293	to enter	doo	dao	dao	dao	dao	dɔɔ	daw	dăw	dâu
294	to exit	lɔh	loh	ləəs	ləəs	lih	loh	lih	ləs	lô-kh'
295	I	ɲɔɔ	ɲee	ʔaŋ	ʔaŋ	ʔɛŋ	ɲɔɔ	ʔɛŋ	ʔeŋ	nhia
296	you	mɨɨ	məə	mɔɔ	mɔɔ	mɔɔ	mɨɨ	mɔɔ	mɔ	mo
297	he, she	dɛɛ	nam	ʔah		nɨɨ nɛɛ	nɨɨ	nɨɨ	nə, nɯ	no
298	we	ʔaʔiə	cuʔ ʔəi	muət ʔee	cuʔ ʔee	ʔah ʔai		cuʔ ay	ʔe	ê
299	you pl	biə	cuʔ bəə	buət bee	cuʔ bee	cuʔ bai		cuʔ bay		bê
300	they		cuʔ ʔah	muət ʔah		cuʔ ʔii		ʔãh		nó
	negator	ɟii	cii	tha	ci	ci	ʔii	ɟii	ci	tạ-kh
	to have	ʔuui	ʔuui	ʔii	ʔii	ʔii	ʔuuy	ʔii	ʔi	uy
	Lao peope			rii		rii	rii	rii	ri	ry

Appendix III: Photos from Ban Saleuy (Houaphan province, Lao PDR, Oliver Tappe, 2019)



Photo 1: Main road of Ban Saleuy (copy of the Sam Neua monument on the left)



Photo 2: Silk weaving



Photo 3: House front



Photo 4: Buddhist temple in Ban Saleuy



Photo 5: Phong-style silk scarf